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BY STARK YOUNG

THE TORCHES FLARE

HEAVEN TREES

THEATRE PRACTICE

GLAMOUR: Essays on the Art of the Theatre

THE THREE FOUNTAINS

THE FLOWER IN DRAMA

The Torches Flare

fiction
Young

The Torches Flare

By
Stark Young

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TO
HERBERT CROLY

The Torches Flare

CHAPTER I

WAITING for any one you dislike but are obliged to meet is annoying in a different way for every different case; but waiting for any one you love is always happy in the same way. I had come to the station to meet Eleanor, but if it had been Miss Dandridge, her aunt, I should have felt the same, or her father, Doctor Dandridge, or even Catherine Sledge, to whose house we were going. As I waited I thought: "Lena will be here soon now; the train from the South is due. I have not seen her in three years. I'm sure she said at the information desk." I took out her telegram and read it again. There were so many exits from trains that the Information would be a better place to meet. "She'll be looking around for me and smiling," I thought. "In half an hour we'll be at Catherine's house."

Catherine Sledge lived in Vandam Street. The house that she had taken was divided into three apartments, two of which she proposed to let, and on the profits of them to have her own apartment free, or almost free—she was somewhat vague about it. It sounded, even to her, like a good business arrangement when she spoke of it, and might have been so if the two young public-school teachers who had leased the first floor had not slipped away in the middle of the night one Sunday and left it vacant.

The top floor was rented by a mining-engineer, who went about a great deal in up-town society and often invited his friends down to his own quarters. The engineer liked the idea of showing them his studio in Bohemia, full of golf-sticks and too pictur-

esque antiques, and he gave many parties; he was drinking himself bloated and was a great fool. He used to send down word when his apartment was chilly, which I have no doubt it often was, that if he could not get heat here he could go where he could buy it; and Catherine said: "Very well, let him go."

She was of a good family in Ohio, her mother, a Boston woman, rather better born than her father; who had come to Ohio from some farm in West Virginia. He had slaved in Cleveland for ten years, and then, when his health failed, had moved to a quieter life in Springfield; and had died suddenly, leaving his wife fifteen thousand a year, and an income of two or three thousand to each of his children. Catherine did not take much after her father's family, who were energetic, conscientious, and tyrannical. She was more like the other side. Her mother's family had a wild streak in it; there had been wanderers to the West, lost sight of long ago in their far-off adventuring, and a son who was a poet and died drunk in bed in a sailor's hotel by the Boston waterfront.

In Catherine's head the wildness came out in a sort of free-mindedness. She was at home with all the theories and radical ideas in modern literature, but took them easily, as if she were in no way responsible for them. In her life the wildness came out in the form of being always in debt one way or another. She did her own cooking, with the help of her Mrs. Norton, a woman who came every other day and washed up and cleaned; she made many of her own clothes. She neglected her health because she would not be bothered with prudence and because doctors and dentists cost so much; and then bought flowers

and perfumes and piles of hats and dresses at sales held by the smartest shops. Often she bought clothes and pretty objects, which she sent to her mother and three sisters at home. They in turn would have to go to the bank and draw on her principal to pay off her debts. She took calmly the letters that her sisters wrote and said they were always like that.

Catherine had lived in New York four years, but had no solid connections. What friends she had, or rather chose to see, were drifting painters and authors, and derelicts out of New York's vague artistic Bohemia, most of them failures and ingrates, with now and then a sweet sort of child among them, and some one unhappy in love. They came and ate her dinners, borrowed her books, and used her typewriter and telephone. Now and then one of them fell in love with her because she seemed to listen seriously to the rambling egotism of his talk and sometimes because, also, she was charming-looking. Some of them she liked because they had talent; some because she chose to like them; she took their parts against a stupid, smug world that she resented. She defended their reckless, free minds against her father's stale principles, and their shiftless lives against efficient Ohio.

I had never at any time seen much of Catherine, and Lena had not seen her since they had known each other abroad the year before, after Lena's graduation from college. But we both loved her for her great, offhand kindness and for her touching remoteness. In spite of her visitors, those struggling talents, black sheep, and childish egoists who came to see her, she seemed always alone and destined always to be alone in her wayward little orbit.

The Memphis train must have come in, for people began pouring into the station with their bags and porters. I wanted to go out to the gate but stuck to our meeting-place at the information corner. More people passed, I saw two men looking back as they walked; one of them, a young man with a pale, proud face, seemed to force himself to give it up and move on with the crowd. The other, shorter and coarser, stopped, as if waiting for something. Then I saw two or three others looking back, and behind them Lena. She was dressed in dark blue—the immediate impression was one of natural elegance and a sort of vivid gentleness. At the same moment she saw me.

"My Lafe!" she cried, and took both of my hands, "Henry Boardman!"

"Well, Lena!" I said. "You got here."

"Lafe, how are you?" Lafe was her old name for me, because of some resemblance she fancied to Lafayette's picture.

"I'm not late, am I? What a beautiful place this is; it sweeps me away."

"This Pennsylvania station?"

"Yes, it sweeps me away. Doesn't it you?"

"Oh, yes. Did you have a good trip?"

"I didn't mind it, Lafe. And there was such a curious woman across the aisle. I couldn't get her out of my mind, she just haunted me. Can we wait here for the porter with my checks?"

"You'd better luck than I did," I said, "when I came North the last time; that was three years ago too. There was a dumpy little woman with a husky, affected voice who talked and fidgeted the whole way. She had a fur coat, magazines, papers, lunch-

boxes half open, cushions, mufflers, all jumbled around in the seat, like a beaver's nest."

Eleanor laughed. Then she returned to her traveller.

"Mine never spoke the whole way. I just kept watching her, till I was all filled up in here." She put her lovely hands to her heart. "I'll never forget that look. I could feel it in my own eyes."

"You'll forget her in New York."

"I've been wondering what I'll forget in New York."

"Lots," I said.

"Lots—ah, well!" She looked at me and smiled.

"Lafe, how are you?"

"I'm fine."

"And how's Catherine? Have you seen her?"

"No. Only on the telephone."

"Does she still like being a librarian?"

"I suppose so, she still is in the public library," I said.

"Well, that's one way to use a college education, Lafe. Mine seems to have flown away."

"I've been thinking," I said, "what a jump it is you are making, to come from your college town to a house like Catherine's. But we can see that later."

At this moment the porter came up with the expressman's check; the trunks would be delivered in a few hours, he said. He gathered up the bags and we followed him to a taxi. Lena had put her arm through mine, and we were both talking at once.

On the way down we talked about Clearwater and what Lena's father and Miss Bessie her aunt would be doing there without her; and began to revive the days when we were both at home, before my mother's

death three years before. Lena's own plans were not very definite, she said. She had come to New York for a change from the vague round of little parties at home and the provincial monotones of life. I smiled inwardly to notice that she did not say she had come also for a chance to learn more about herself. That sort of confidence would not have been like her—not even very Southern, in fact, for all our friendly openness.

The taxi stopped at our number on Vandam Street. Catherine's was a house with one of those Georgian doors that are so safe as far as good taste goes and so well suited to drawings in Sunday magazines. It always seemed to me droll that such a lean security and thin choiceness in stale things should have been Catherine's door.

She met us at the landing and took us up-stairs quietly but with a sweet sort of happiness at seeing Lena. But I was due for my Freshman class at Columbia and could not sit down. I stood a moment with my hat in my hand, while we tried to make our plans. Lena, of course, had no engagement for that evening, and Catherine was free.

"Well, then," I said, "the first thing people do in New York is to go to the theatre. They never see New York no matter how long they stay. Never if they live here. It's because nobody knows who did anything. Kittie, do you know who did the Brooklyn Bridge?"

Kittie shook her head, laughing, or laughing as much as she ever did, and looking at Lena with an expression of delight and surprise, as if she were even lovelier than we had remembered.

"We can at least all talk," Lena said. She put her

hand through my arm. "Are there some very good plays, Hal?"

"The noisier ones are better."

Catherine agreed with me.

"I can't bear Broadway when it tries to think," she said. "The serious plays are good, I suppose, but I just can't bear them, that's all. No, what am I talking about? They're not good, they're just innocent."

"Let's be sure and see something you haven't seen already, Hal," Lena said. "No self-sacrifice now, hear?"

I had seen so little of the new season that choosing a play would be easy.

"And we'll all dine here," Kittie said. She stood there smiling, but the clear, pathetic eyes looked somewhere on beyond me as she spoke.

I promised to telephone for seats and to be back again at seven; and left them spread out on the sofa with all they had to talk about. It was cool enough already for a fire, and the wood burning threw a yellow, pulsing light on the hearth and out over the room.

CHAPTER II

AFTER the theatre that night we took a taxi down to Washington Square and then got out and walked. We had stopped as we walked along the south end of the square, and were looking at the little dolphin fountain on the corner of Stanford White's church, when Cleveland Towns called to us. You could see his teeth shining a long way off and his face was very pink. I knew he must have been to his favorite place in Macdougall Street, where they make a specialty of rum in every shape—rum in coffee, rum in tea, hot buttered rum with cinnamon in it, rum punch, and five or six other concoctions. The rum is good—it is Cuban rum brought in by the purser on a shipping-line to South America. Cleveland was not drunk; he was just at the right stage exactly for him; if he had more to drink he was strenuous or rash or sick and went on for two or three days, but at this stage all his natural sweetness and wit came out.

"Come on," he said; "I'm just going to Marie's."

I introduced Eleanor. Catherine knew him already. She never went any more to these silly Village places, she said, and Cleveland began to explain to her that Marie's was different. I was helping him to find the knob in the dim light and open the door; he had had more rum than I thought.

Romany Marie's was the only place in Greenwich Village that still kept something of what the Village had when it began. There was nothing illicit about it, not a place for liquor or breakdown dances or assignations; it was not noisy or got up for visitors

to Bohemia. It was not spectacular, unless you thought that of Marie's wearing a costume now and then and loving heavy gypsy bracelets and rings, or of Marchand's, her partner's, costumes and suits of clothes in various styles. There was a large front room on Washington Square where tourists and general patrons were put; and there was a smaller room on the left where the favored guests sat around the tables on stools and benches, and a wood fire was burning. Sometimes Marie said—to people who did not understand the place and thought they were doing Montmartre—that they would not like it here, and sent them away again down the stair.

Cleveland never paid at Marie's; he ate and drank there as a guest and made up for it by his music. There was a table for us by the far wall. Cleveland asked for his *café bourgeois* and I had one, and Catherine and Lena had glasses of tea. There was a Japanese writer near by with long hair pushed back from his forehead and eyes almost shut. He was eating a sandwich of cold meat with tomatoes, and Cleveland asked for a plate of that. Marie took some black coffee in an odd cup and saucer to a Spaniard who was talking about the prompters in Madrid theatres, how hard they worked and how they go to acting the play themselves before we were through with it; the prompter, he said, flung his arms around and thundered out his passionate inspiration. "But, after all," he said, "you couldn't blame him, poor fellow, he wants to express himself too."

"Why, no," Marie said. "And after all——"

She sat down with us and we began to talk. She looked admiringly at Eleanor, who was talking with Cleveland.

"I'm so glad to see you at last," Lena said, turning to her. "Hal has been telling us about you."

"You must come back again," Marie said, in her low, downright voice. "Yes, he's an old friend. You've not been here often this year, Hal."

"No," I said, "not so often. But I don't forget."

"That's right."

"But the Madrileños are good actors," the Spaniard said, from his table.

Marie nodded her head. "But look, why don't you act yourself?" she said, turning to Lena. "You do something, I think. No?"

"Nothing. Do I, Hal?"

I only smiled. Marie went on. "But your voice is very exciting; you sound more like my country."

"Do I?" Lena had the sweet, friendly look in her eyes. "Me?"

"Of course you do."

She called out, beckoning to a man sitting by the door: "Her voice is exciting, Dexter, no?"

"My God, yes!" he answered.

"Why you looking at us like that, Dexter?"

"Like your pretty dress."

"No, you don't. And it's an old dress. My costume is better. Come on over here, I know what you're looking at." She slid along and made room for him at the end of the bench. "It's you," she said to Lena. "He's got his eyes on you. He'll be wanting to paint your portrait."

She introduced him. His name was Dexter Woon, and I had seen paintings of his at exhibitions. He was a big man, six feet two or three inches high, and heavy-set. His skin was coarse and his brown hair thick and crimped. His paintings were unequal, but

they had, at least, variety and energy. I was so surprised to see him like this, so big and porous-looking, that I forgot to notice his absurd name. Cleveland Towns was drunk enough to permit himself the humor of it.

"Mr. Woon?" he said, smiling too much.

"Does the name astonish you?" the painter asked.

"We couldn't be judges of that," I said; "we know it already too well by reputation."

Marie thanked me by handing me a cigarette and lighting it for me.

Cleveland kept it up.

"The trouble with that name is I'd always be expecting you to fly off South."

"Cleveland goes on like that," Marie apologized.

"I mean at this season of the year."

"I'm too poor for resorts."

"I don't mean you, I mean some sort of blamed bird."

"She would make a lovely picture, wouldn't she?" Marie said hurriedly to Mr. Woon. "Try it."

"I wish I might."

"It's a new kind of compliment," Lena said. "That's one compliment Southern young ladies have not been taught to answer gracefully."

"We'll pay it again," Dexter Woon said, not taking his eyes off Lena's face even after she blushed and said nothing.

"I don't think you got me in my portrait," Marie said to him. "It's so staring. I know you like it."

"It's my best portrait," he said.

"His landscapes are better," Marie turned to us again. "Oh, yes, they're very fine."

The Spaniard and the young lady with him with

the elaborate voice came over and stood by our table on the way out. They were still talking about the theatre. She had been trying to talk Spanish but had come back to English.

"There must be marvellous things done in South America. Why don't we get more of them, I often think?" she remarked, not expecting to be answered, but merely saying these things. She looked egotistical but undesired.

"But it's not late," Marie said. "Sit down here."

Some people were leaving and had gone to her desk to pay. Marie went over and said good night to them, and the Spaniard dragged the bench over and sat down with us. Every one was talking of the plays that had come to town for the fall season.

"What did you see to-night?" Dexter Woon asked.

"Saw *The Buccaneer*. Wanted to hear some words, and this is the play's last week. You'd know from *What Price Glory* that we'd get vibrating words," I said.

"From Maxwell Anderson and Laurence Stallings?"

"Yes."

"And how did you get on, Miss Dandridge?" he added, and I could hear in his voice that this was what he had been coming to.

"Me? I was green every minute with envy. Envy-ing Estelle Winwood that heavenly part she had to play. Every young lady in the house felt the same way, I suppose."

"Oh, no, I doubt it," Catherine said drily. "If it were Marilyn Miller in *Sally*, that would be another matter."

Romany Marie came back again and there was a lot

of talk about the theatre and music in which anybody about the room joined as he chose or the spirit moved him. In this place, with its dingy walls and poor comfort, there was no vulgarity and nothing crass; the talk was all of beauty and creation.

It was past one o'clock when we came out into the clear, sharp air of the street.

"She's beautiful every way," Marie whispered to me when I was paying our little bill. I knew what she meant.

"You're up the wrong tree, Marie, if you think—" I said.

She only laughed at me. "Ah, no."

"Ah, yes," I said.

"Does everybody talk like this about the theatre all the time?" Lena asked as we started off along the south side of the Square. "Just theatre?"

"I'm afraid so."

"I'll be stage-struck before we know it."

Catherine laughed. "I think I'm the only person you'll meet in New York who isn't writing a play. Hal, aren't you writing a play now?"

"Well—" I began. The truth was I had thought of an idea for a play while the Spaniard was talking about the prompter. There could be a scene where we saw only the prompter and got from him what was going on privately between two actors on the stage. He would be prompting and trying to keep the play going and at the same time would let us see what was happening about the actors themselves—a story within a story. But yet I was not writing a play.

"Well," I repeated, "I'm not."

"Or wanting to act?" Catherine said.

"If you resist the theatre, what will you occupy

yourself with, Lena?" I said. "I mean all this winter."

She laid her hand on my arm. "I don't know. But listen, honey. I was thinking to-night, I don't want you to have me on your mind, you're so sweet. You're not to be having me on your hands."

On my hands! Lena! As if——

I could have cried. I was thankful to Catherine for hailing a taxi that came along from Waverly Place.

"We'd better ride," she said. "I've got to get up in the morning. I'm in business."

I held open the door and started to follow them. She stopped me.

"No, Hal, don't be silly. We'll get home easily. You live a mile away."

"Well, what of it?" I said.

"Don't be silly; Eleanor knows we're not gallant here, not in a town ten miles long, you couldn't."

"You don't know me."

"It's what I was just telling you, Lafe," Lena said, smiling. "So good night. Run home."

She threw me a kiss.

"How's day after to-morrow?" I called, as they started.

"Fine. Call me up."

"We'll go up to the Metropolitan after dinner. It's open Saturday nights. It looks marvellous at night."

"Divine! Good night, Hal."

"Good night."

I turned down Waverly Place to Barrow Street.

CHAPTER III

I WAS all day Friday and most of Saturday on *Lacquered Screens*, by Beulah Eisner, which I had promised an editor to review by Tuesday. I know Beulah Eisner slightly; she was one of the friends of Judith Boyle, whose apartment was under mine in Barrow Street; her book was one of those novels that all my born instincts most detested. The story concerned a Catholic girl married into a rich Jewish family. It was written by a person whose senses were dull and vague, who had no clear objective perceptions, and who, therefore, would have no perceptions to go on but her own turgid insides. How could it matter what she thought of anything when she never saw what the thing was that she was thinking about? There was a perpetual analysis of character and motive all through her book and a great show of problem and meaning. The analysis was mechanical and the persistent psychology flat and trumped up. Such stuff as "he was not passionate but affectionate"; "she had, or thought she had, as she realized now his lack of realization or understanding of her, a perfect right, or at least excuse, for resisting his care of her," et cetera, was only matching of words; was rubbish.

As for me, what I should have liked to write for a review of *Lacquered Screens*, with its diagnosing profundities and psychological inquiry, was one line:

Boswell: Sir, what would you do if you were shut up in a tower with a little baby?

Surely that ought to suggest analysis enough. But no

editor would accept such a review, and quite rightly.

Just as I was leaving my room to go for her on Saturday evening Lena called me on the telephone to say that she would have to join me later. She would meet me at the Metropolitan at nine o'clock, at the foot of the stairs. And so I endured a dull dinner at the Faculty Club alone. At the very last Edward Garner, who had the same sort of classes as mine at Columbia, and a man named Dudensing, who did some sort of teaching in architecture, stopped on their way to the door and came over to my table.

"Hello, Boardman," said Garner; "I wanted to ask, is it you reviewing *Lacquered Screens*?"

"Yes; why?"

"Oh, I don't know; I'm doing it for a syndicate, that's all. I just thought of it."

"Pays better," I said.

"But no prestige. Damn little prestige."

"Oh, well, none of it's anything to lose sleep over," I said.

"But you don't want to write just reviews, do you? You want to write your own books, don't you?"

"Oh, yes. Suppose I never will."

"People who are interested in us must find us stale beer, right," he said.

"What makes you think anybody'd be interested in us at all?" I asked.

"Feel sore about reviewing?"

"No. Not reviewing books. Books don't matter. It's just that what if it's my luck to be nothing but a reviewer."

"Of life?"

"Exactly."

"Well, I've thought the same thing of myself. It's

what I call the academic depression." I could see that the phrase satisfied and eased him. Making it was enough for him. I smiled politely.

Dudensing spoke up. I noticed how short his thumbs were.

"Well, I'll cut the gloom by running along; I'm due at Times Square in ten minutes."

I walked down to the 110th Street entrance of the park and followed the winding roads south. There were not many people out, the air was sharp, and it was Saturday, when everybody left in town goes to the theatre or the moving pictures or dancing. I walked along and saw how the trees blazed out black and yellow and red where the lights were, and then faded back again into shadow. On the open fields and the rising ground I saw how gray and faint the rocks looked and how quiet the world grew. A wind came and went among the leaves, very soft. How easy it would be to drop back into the old ways when I used to stray into the garden at Friendship and sit talking on the porch at all hours!

The season at home was best in October and early November, and many of the flowers in the garden were blooming again. Year after year people down there, and my own people in the family, had seen things grow and fade, walking out on some business or to entertain themselves, and when they came in, speaking of what they had seen. What did they make of it all, seeing the wild asters blooming, or the roses, or the autumn sky, as they had seen them often before? It could not have been their main life. What was their main life?

Things closer within them?

CHAPTER IV

AT any rate, though it might have slipped me back or seemed to slip me back into the old friendly company and easy ways, having Lena here from home like that, I knew it would not happen. New York would see to that. Here you made engagements days ahead for the shortest call; and there was not a friend, except the invalids, that you could count on finding in if a moment came when you wanted to see him. In the clear night around me I could have thought myself walking at home. But this was New York. Perhaps it was just as well.

I had lost interest in seeing the Museum, but wanted to be on hand by nine o'clock. Eleanor was sure to be late, but I wanted to be there in case she should come. It made me cross at myself to be so set on being on time when Lena was not, but I felt that way. Lena's habit of being late and keeping things waiting was not from selfishness. It was because she was absorbed in the moment; her world at the moment was timeless and all in all. She would have given you her head, but she could not be on time. Lena was never very late after all, and it was not half past nine when I saw her, with Judith Boyle, coming across Fifth Avenue toward the Museum steps.

Judith knew everybody, but was a good friend of Catherine's and was often in Vandam Street. She had the making of a good painter in her but had never managed, perhaps, to stick at it. Or perhaps she wandered too far out of any line or style of painting that would lead to recognition; or perhaps

she gave her brightest energies to life. Whatever it was, she could not support herself at painting.

She earned a fair enough living by designing for manufacturers of silk and by doing batik work. Patterns of chiffon and silks were sent her by smart shops and she painted and dyed them in batik. Four men wanted to marry her, and she chose the leanest and poorest of them all, Ralph Boyle, by birth the son of a Connecticut preacher and by profession some kind of patent expert, and for three years she had been in love with him and he with her. In June Ralph had gone to London to make some researches in the government patent office, and had not returned yet.

Judith looked like the child of George Washington and Anna Pavlova. She had lived in Denver till she was seventeen years old, when she came to New York with the Salvation Army. From the Salvation Army she graduated into art. She used to regale us sometimes with an impersonation of herself singing in a down-town meeting-hall, "What a friend we have in Jesus," and right afterward she did the elders among the bums, with their slobbery mouths, stretching their necks to stare at the virginal morsel before them.

"Lena, where's Catherine?" I said.

"Kittie couldn't come. She's gone to bed with a headache. You see, Gentry Craig was there all the afternoon. He showed her three hundred drawings he'd made in Spain."

Judith laughed.

"Talking all the time."

"Kittie loves him," Lena went on, "but she still

can't stand three hours and three hundred drawings. She's taken pyramidon for her head."

"Did you see them, Lena?"

"No, only fifty or so. I was out getting my hair shampooed. Judith saw them all."

Judie rubbed her hands together.

"And stood it like a horse, old Judie did," she said.

"Judie, were they good?" I asked.

"Pretty damn good. Kittie's gone to bed."

"But what about the Museum?" I said. "You're fed up on art."

"Almost. I'm afraid I am."

"But just to see it this way at night!" Lena begged; "just a flash of it, Judie."

"The question is, can I stand it? I'll go for twenty minutes sharp. You see, Hal, after Gentry we'd have telephoned, but we couldn't reach you. We can come another time."

"Twenty minutes, word of honor," Lena said.

"And afterward," Judie nodded, "we'll go by Romany Marie's on the way home and I'll sing some with Cleveland Towns. That'll let us down."

It would indeed, I thought.

We took our little concession in the Museum, speeding along through the rooms where the paintings were, and followed Judie to the bus.

Judie couldn't really have been so very sorry for that flying glance, I said. In that unfamiliar light the marbles and pictures had taken on a splendor like that of palaces. Some of the naturalists and impressionists had seemed very middle-class and undone; but the Van Dycks, Titians, Rubens and other old masters, even the religious pictures, had looked very rare and polished and worldly.

"Even the religious subjects," Judie said; "even

the martyrdoms look snappy and palatial. Makes art seem very de luxe, don't it, Hal?"

"Well, it's a rest to see art given back to the princes," I said.

From the top of the bus we saw the lights and shapes of Fifth Avenue, the cross streets with their dwindling lines. Beyond the arch Washington Square looked very soft and quiet when we came into it. Garibaldi's statue stood up higher than in the daytime, when the square is full of people. Its realism gave it a silly outline, like something children had set up.

At Romany Marie's Cleveland Towns was singing some blues, which said in sad tones that he had combed his hair and manicured his nails. He sang pleasantly, with a good sense of rhythm.

"Here, I'd like some food," Judie said. "Kit's collapsing like that wrecked my dinner."

She had the sandwiches with the tomato, and afterward she and Cleveland made up some duets out of the songs in *Patience*, and Judie stood with her arms held out, hands clasped like a prima donna, and sang. People looked at each other patiently and looked at Judie. She had a small but terrible voice.

When the songs ended every one applauded, laughing, and Judie sat down to turn the pages of some Spanish music that lay in a pile between two plaster heads after the school of Brancusi.

"What does Mr. Cleveland Towns do?" Lena asked me.

"What you see him doing, I suppose."

"Playing the piano?"

"No. Whatever you saw him doing whenever you saw him."

"Just drifts."

"Very nicely. People love him. All sorts of people are crazy over him."

"He's sweet. But how does he live? I'm always curious to know how people live."

"He just does," I said; "people like him. That's all."

"After all, money exists. I'm not good on business. But the only way I know not to be worried about money is to have a little."

"I suppose Cleveland would like it," I said. "He could have jobs. Acting, writing, music—in a small way, of course. But he's drunk too much. So he just stays around. I believe he had a room once. But he just stays where he happens to be—he called on me once and spent three days—slept on the couch."

Dexter Woon came in with a girl who danced in the Follies and the two of them went over and sat down by the fireplace. He bowed to us, and when the girl saw him staring so long at Eleanor she got up angrily.

"You can do what you like, Woon, but I don't like myself in this place. Let's go over to The Circus."

Erschine Chambers got up with them and came over to our table. He was an Englishman who wrote reviews of moving pictures. I had met him in his office at the newspaper. All he was interested in was playing golf all day and coming back and saying the room was hot.

"How do you happen way down here?" I said.

"Tell you the truth," he said, "I'm looking for a drink. I've just been taking my vacation in Hollywood, and miss it."

"Drinks?"

"Yes."

"Well, you won't get it here."

He leaned over confidentially.

"Oh, come on, what's it all about, then?"

"Talk," I said, "conversation. You tell us how were the stars of the silver screen. Is Hollywood enthralling?"

"No, no, no. But very kind, I must say. Tell you who I liked."

"Who?"

"Marion Davies. I was surprised. She's very clever, you know—jolly amusing, I thought——"

"Is she?" I had never seen a film of Marion Davies.

"She's very cute, you know—I mean when she talks—I say——" he sagged into a maudlin falsetto chuckle at the thought of how cute Marion Davies was.

"But I say—are we dry here really?" he began again.

"Absolutely."

"By God!"

"Try on down the street. Fourth Street, Macdougall Street. They're flowing with it."

"I jolly well will. So long!"

"So long."

People kept dropping in at Romany Marie's and out again. At one o'clock Lena and I left. Judie stayed on with Cleveland. He would go by Macdougall Street for a drink or two, and then she would walk him about till three o'clock or so, telephone to ask some friend if he could take him in for the night, and then put Cleveland in a cab, give him his fare, and send him off.

CHAPTER V

As we walked along Lena turned to me suddenly with a little frown: "But, Hal, tell me, what do all—?" Then she decided not to say what was in her mind. "Does every one in the Village keep these hours?" she said, looking about her in the streets, where people were walking about at one o'clock as if it were noon.

"But that's not what you started to say. You were going to ask what all these people we've been seeing at the theatre and at Romany Marie's do, how they live; isn't that it?"

She turned her head and looked at me, smiling.

"That's it exactly. I was wondering what they do. After all there's such a thing as children in the world, and such a thing as life that goes on, and old ties, and years passing and all."

We began to talk about these constant things and how they cost more in New York, in money or in wear and tear. The rich, the well-to-do, and the poor lead the family life in New York; it is less easy for artists and the general run of professional people. But these people we had been seeing to-night, they wanted to escape this settled, constant living.

I began to tell Lena about a house in Broome Street that a young painter had shown me one night after the theatre. His friends were in the back room, playing cards by candle-light; one of them wore an orange tam-o'-shanter and one of them, a big, black chap, they called The Bear. The front parlor they

let to two Italian women who made artificial flowers. The rent of the house was forty dollars a month. There was no plumbing except on the second-floor landing, where there was a tap; it had frozen and burst and was shooting a spray of water over the stairs. In the back area were the toilet and a shed with a bootlegging still.

"I can understand that some of these people have their art to go on with," Lena said.

"Such art as it is," I said. "But even that makes some difference."

"But the others, Lafe. To grow older, it will be terrible."

"Look coming," I said, as a figure in a skirt cut to the knees and a jacket made out of a Paisley shawl approached. "Yon she comes!"

"Hello, Hal," the woman called to me as she saluted with her left hand and swung jauntily on past. Her grizzled hair stuck straight down from the edge of her tight little hat. She had great silver earrings and a hot glamour of black around her large open eyes. Her flabby cheeks and long neck were powdered white as dough, her sagging mouth was bright red. We both turned for a second and glanced at her retreating figure; it was jaunty but thin-legged and rickety.

"Who's that?" Lena asked.

"May Coleman. She's always about the Village. Almost sixty, I should think. She was doing the Charleston last time I saw her."

"That's what I meant."

"I know."

We walked along Cornelia Street and up Bleecker.

"I reckon I'm too fresh from the country,"

Eleanor said to me as we parted. "It seems a crazy way to live."

"Of course," I said, "we've got to remember we're transients, like hundreds of thousands in New York. If I settled down to live here, I'd try to know some solid householders. Like my friend, Mrs. Courtlandt."

"They'll be sitting there at Romany Marie's for hours, I suppose," Lena said.

"Oh, yes, hours."

"I suppose the more they're like that the more they come here, and the longer they are here the more they are like that."

On the way home from Lena's I was thinking of the people that must be here in New York, and that were over the country, whose days had a certain humdrum solid; people who went about their plans, were bound by their ties, were settled into their sober necessities. These would be people such as most of us were born from. They are the foundations of us and have given us the few simple things that we know and live by.

But here was Eleanor launched into another world.

As I unlocked my door in Barrow Street I thought of the Miss Tankersley, with her strained yellow face and dingy hair, who had had my apartment before me. She had lived there for five years with some woman a trifle older than herself who read and reported on new novels at five dollars each for a moving-picture bureau. They had quarrelled and her companion had gone away. After two months alone Miss Tankersley had given up her job in a tea-room, left the apartment full of bottles that had been used for home-made wine, tin cans from the grocer's, old

clothes, and dirt, and gone home to her family in Kansas. She was too tired of everything to care what anybody said. I had wondered what her family thought at the sight of her when she got home.

CHAPTER VI

I DID not see Lena again for five weeks. The Extension Department at Columbia had sent me off rather suddenly on a trip of conferences and lectures at various schools and colleges in Illinois and Ohio. It was a work intended to widen the range of the university and to increase the enrolment in the department. My mission was very personal; I was supposed to meet as many teachers and students as possible, and to spread the impression, I dare say, that my university was the fountain of knowledge and that at Columbia of all places were those sweet springs of light for which all thirst.

I had written twice to Lena, hoping that she was happy, and she replied to tell me that she had moved to Judie's apartment, which was under mine in Barrow Street, and so we should be neighbors. Judie was to be alone there; Ralph planned to remain all winter abroad. Lena was to have the same space as Judie, for the plan of the house gave duplicate arrangements, front and back. The invitation came in good time; with Catherine Sledge marrying and giving up her place, Lena would have had to find another roof somewhere.

Lena coming to live with us in Barrow Street! I thought. And with Judie! That ought to be a wide enough swing from Clearwater. Judie was a jump even from Catherine Sledge. "Good," I wrote, "we'll be neighbors!" and added, quoting Napoleon when he put his brother into the royal palace to be king of Spain, "Joseph, vous êtes mieux logé que

moi"—Lena was palatial, compared to my bumping about in the hotels of college towns.

There was something, also, that she wanted to talk over with me, Lena wrote, and, if I would telegraph when I started for New York, she would keep the next afternoon free of engagements and would join me at my office, and we could walk part of the way home and drop in somewhere for tea or something.

I got in on an early train from Chicago; had a bath, a change of linen, and a talk with Mrs. Norton, who had arrived by nine with a bottle of milk and some eggs from a friend's farm to bake me a custard, and had the room already shining. By ten I was at Columbia for my Monday class. I had not seen Lena, but Mrs. Norton had told me that she was settled in her new rooms. She had helped Lena to move and had pressed and put everything away for her. "Ain't she sweet?" Mrs. Norton said.

I gave her a note asking Lena to meet me at four. I would be at the subway entrance on 116th Street, I said, at four, and wait for her.

A few minutes after four I saw Lena coming up the subway steps. She wore a sort of fawn color, with touches of burnt orange. Her eyes were gray and clear, her brown hair shining, her sweet, pure mouth fresh like a child's. In the midst of my crowded travels I had forgotten, not how beautiful she was, but how gentle and vivid she seemed.

The traffic made such a noise that we had to shout our greetings and the compliments that were to be paid over Lena's coming to our house in Barrow Street.

"I know a place where it is quiet," I shouted then.

"Over by the river?"

"Not to-day, there's too much wind."

We went a few blocks south and then by a cross street to a speak-easy where we could sit and talk awhile; in New York now it takes the crime of bootlegging to balance the crime of sitting and talking instead of rushing out as soon as you have eaten or drunk and letting others have your place.

Over at the corner table sat young Professor Campbell and his wife, and with them the Mark Levine whose reputation his students in ethics had done so much to spread, though he had written little.

I had rather liked the Campbells when I first met them at a faculty tea for the wives of graduate students. Her motherly bulk and his dyspeptic frame, with a nose like a little bird, had seemed touched with the eternal play of the unworldly mind. The two of them kept up about everything a kind of ironical banter that had at first seemed gay and clear-headed. But I had soon seen that this light irony and teasing mockery was a species of compensation—if they could not create these works of art or did not allow themselves these passions with which humanity is engaged, they could at least dispose of them with the light touch of humor.

Professor Levine's reviews I knew; they were impatient now and then and somewhat tart, but the mind in them was studious and distinguished. He had the reputation of being a difficult figure in his classroom, asking a question about something and, when the answer came, saying: "Well, Mr. So and So, you consider that true, no doubt, but the fact is it's not true." This was the kind of thing that in colleges is often considered arresting and even witty. I took in at a glance, now that I saw Mark Levine for the

first time, that he was a man who had something to get even with in life. He was revenging himself for something. He sat turned half away from the table; I looked at his feet; they were flat and seemed to be left to themselves—flat, pigeon-toed, and awkward, with a careless arrogance. The ugly head looked intelligent, Dantesque, and stubbornly insistent on being observed. He had something in him that refused to be hurt any more; his case was pathetic, no doubt, but it was ugly.

We went up and spoke to them just as they were leaving, and the Campbells said they were going to a moving picture which was, they declared, very grand and lurid, with battle, murder, and sudden death. It sounded to me as if in their hearts they would really like the picture, but got their academic comfort out of mocking it like that. The three went out together.

"That's my college world," I said to Lena.

"Is it rather thin?" she asked.

"Yes, it's rather thin."

We ordered a claret cup, and the waiter, a high-strung little Florentine with whom I had often talked, pointed out, smiling, a sprig of mint that he had put into it. The pitcher was covered with frost and the mint seemed to stand fresh and green in dew. Lena looked tenderly at the soft branching leaves.

"I wish I could see them all at home," Lena said.

"You'll see them all Christmas," I said.

"I'm wondering what will happen. I've a sort of plan; I talked it over with Kittie before I moved, and with Judie too."

"Well," I said, "I'm glad Kittie's getting rid of her bloodsuckers—curs on Parnassus. Is Gentry Craig one of the pathetics?"

"Oh, no, Hal; oh, no," Lena said. "You've seen him."

"Once at the Coffee-House—across the table at lunch. His gusto glittered over the place, perhaps those bright teeth, too."

"I think she fell in love with his teeth first," Lena said.

"I can understand that," I said. "It's a sort of bursting on you."

"Hal . . ." Eleanor laughed, "you're articulate, aren't you?"

"I hope so."

"You're a monkey, Hal!"

"Well, that's all right."

"At any rate Gentry talked so about pictures, and steamed about so and crashed over the room so, that she used to be exhausted, used to take two aspirin tablets and go to bed. He made her head ache at first. And his painting bewildered her. Only now she's got pyramidon, it seems to help her headache better than aspirin. So pyramidon made the match."

"I saw his exhibition last year. Old Bangor said his mountains looked like chocolate sundaes. 'But what does that matter,' I said, 'if chocolate sundaes look like mountains?' 'Chocolate sundae,' he repeated, 'chocolate sundae,' pleased with himself under those whiskers dyed in walnut-brown. I knew the old walrus had to get himself a phrase, because he had to write something at all odds for his magazine, and couldn't make heads or tails of this painting."

"But you liked them?" she asked, eagerly.

"Not all of them and not all of many that I did like. But yes, I liked them; I should say I did."

"He'll drag her over the earth," Eleanor said.

"But it will be a living earth."

"Yes."

"And other women? Isn't he a bit galavanting?" I asked.

"I think he'll stick to her. She had an education, which he had not the chance to get; his father was a longshoreman in Gloucester; and she's so remote and yet so gentle. He worships her."

"And even at the worst you'd rather have only a part of him than the whole of a bond-selling dummy," I said. "On the basis that a tenth of a hundred is more than all of three."

But that was not what Eleanor wanted to talk to me about. She was going into a try-out in a little down-town acting group. Some of Judie's friends from the Provincetown Playhouse had been telling her about a performance at which plays intended for Broadway would be tried first with amateurs. The advantage to the dramatists was that they themselves could see how their works came over the foot-lights and could have producers in to look at the plays and perhaps take them over. To the players and the school where the try-outs were given, there was the little advantage of seeing yourself and being seen. The performances were to be early in November.

"And what do you think, Hal?"

"It won't do any harm, I'm sure. And it might be a jolly thing to do. It certainly would give you still another slant on New York."

"It certainly ought to, oughtn't it?"

I said only "yes," but I was suddenly conscious of a feeling as if fate were leading Eleanor to her right destiny. I felt that sudden darkening and glow deep

within me that one feels when something final in life arrives. But I only waited for Lena to go on.

This prospect of acting must not have impressed her very deeply, from Lena's next remark.

"And just about the time that's over it will be Christmas and I'll be flying down home. It's a long time since I've seen them all. Auntee writes to me every week and so does father."

"That's nice," I said. Since my mother's death I got no letters from Clearwater.

"She writes everything, all the little things she knows I'd like to hear, weather and cousins. Father writes little short letters, mostly the same thing, and always says he's very proud of me. But most fathers wouldn't write at all, only send you checks."

I brought the subject back to the theatre, and we began to talk about Southern people in the arts, Southern people of Lena's class. It would be hard for them to believe that art is the only thing in life for them.

"Of course it's not," Lena said.

"Nevertheless," I said, "if you are a child of the theatre you can't leave it or be anything else. You have a passion for showing yourself off, and that's the heart and centre of a theatre instinct. But there'd be times when you, Lena, would think it enough just being yourself without your being seen being it."

"Of course."

"Moreover," I said, "to a little girl from the East Side, or a girl whose father was a taxi-driver, any getting on is wonderful. Mere clothes from Fifth Avenue are thrilling, the chance to spend money is thrilling, a picture of her in the paper is orgiastic. But you, as a good, absurd Southerner, begin at the top, all pride, and can only descend."

She laughed at me for saying that.

I made another point, something I had often thought about: if you are brought up as Lena had been you are always a host; you feel with every one that one way or another he is your guest. Then what will you do as an artist, treating the public as your guests? It may give you grace, perhaps, tact, charm, and even a certain exquisite fineness of spirit. But sometimes you need an edge, a bald edge, no matter what anybody thinks.

"However strongly you feel, honey, however dear something might be to you, you'd find it hard to slap your guests in the face with it. And in the theatre of all places you slap it in."

"Did Duse?" Lena asked, her eyes fixed on mine, dilated and intense; I was doing her harm perhaps with this.

"No," I said suddenly, "I'm only a fool!"

"I'm afraid you were right about a lot of it."

"But, Lena," I said, "even if all this were true of you, you'd make it up in other ways. Honey, you'd make it up with what you give to life. You'd bring that to any art."

There were tears in Lena's eyes. She leaned down and kissed my hand.

CHAPTER VII

WE paid the bill, said good-by and thanks to the little Florentine, took a taxi down to Gramercy Park, and from there started to walk home. At Waverly Place I left Eleanor and turned off to see if Gentry Craig was at home. I thought it would be pleasant to go by and congratulate him.

All the way down we had talked little, each of us thinking his own thoughts. I had been thinking of Eleanor and her adventure into the theatre, even at this mere fringe of Broadway that the try-out implied. She was only like all those thousands of other people in America who feel drawn to the theatre world, to the stage, to play-writing, directing, designing, dramatic criticism. There is something about it oddly expressive of our native scene nowadays.

The theatre is exciting and active, and life with us now is busy, progressive, restless, and bored.

The theatre exhibits and exploits you, and this is an age of individual display and very personal urge; you must show yourself if you would be in demand.

The theatre gives you quick fame, puts you in the papers, and we live by the press and draw our opinion and judgments of everything from its publicity.

When she was a child Lena used to take fire with anything she heard. People's stories lifted her to the skies or struck her soul dumb; if what they said was gay she laughed and soared, if sad she went about half dead. That eager little child, with her honest, troubled eyes, I used to see her standing by the window looking at the light under the trees when there

had been a clear sunset, her hands resting on the frame, as still as the shadows outside. I used to see her put her hand to her throat when there was music, almost any music. She liked to parade and recite; and her father used to listen to her declaiming out of Shakespeare, "Oh, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?" or "Is this a dagger which I see before me?" And I can see her now in the lamplight, lisping Bulwer's *Aux Italiens* and coming so earnestly to that "oh, the thmell of the jathmine flower!"

In school she acted when there were entertainments to act in, and in her Clearwater College days she was three times the leading lady for the dramatic club. All I can remember is that they were great successes, these performances of Lena's, and were spoken of at Clearwater, I remember, as natural; Lena was so natural on the stage. But nobody thought it promised much as acting; the tradition of acting there was still high with the old-school ranting and sonorities, the sister art of Southern oratory.

Well, Lena could try herself out at the Orchard Theatre, and we should see what we should see.

Gentry Craig was in his studio when I knocked. He shook hands, put down his palette and brush, and shook hands again, shouting and smiling and yet a little formal; it was the formality of natural taste perhaps. He had on a blue flannel shirt, the tail of which, stuffed into his worn tweed trousers, made him look very stocky in the thighs. He had the look of a child and a lusty man, and nothing in between. From this there arose a curious, sensitive simplicity and poetic vigor.

I congratulated him on his coming marriage.

"She's a grand person," he said.

We did not sit down but stood talking a moment about Catherine. Then he said:

"Good. Did you see my exhibition last year?"

"Yes," I said.

"Did you like the things?"

"I liked many of them. In too many, though, there was some spot or other that seemed perverse, arbitrary, not really true to the rest. Do you see what I mean?" I asked.

"I see what you mean, but I don't recall just what in any picture. Then how do you like this one?"

He went to the far corner of the room to get a canvas.

"That stuff over there on the other side of the couch," he said, "I won't show you. Just slapping, not painting. When I do a picture it's got to come off, something final and solid, like a hen laying an egg."

Around the walls meanwhile I saw pictures of the sea, of fields, of promontories with men beneath in rowboats and fishing-smacks. He was a painter to the bone, so much a painter that he thought evidently very little about the color, the line, the brush. What he thought of was the sky above that land, of the land, of the passionate world that passed into him and forced him toward his own passionate beauty. His poetry was male and downright.

"I think this year I'm better," he said; "hope you like this one."

He set a silvered frame on the easel and into it a landscape. Ridges and fields descending to a stream-bed. Toward the upper centre there was a stretch of sea. A powerful simplification had gone on. It was no country anywhere that you saw there, but a picture. And yet these forms were derived from the actual

world, they were based on nature and arose from the painter's response to the world. This courage of his gave them their austerity and design, as they had first given him his emotion. The slopes and ridges were dull ochres and sharp raw green, underlined with black. On the water the sun from somewhere above made a white path.

CHAPTER VIII

I HAD to meet a group of students from the graduate school at Columbia and so missed the try-out at the little Orchard Theatre. It was a small affair, before the friends of the players, who were mostly amateurs, with a sprinkling of professionals; which, nowadays in the theatre, does not mean that you are expert necessarily, or better than people who have never acted. Professionals are actors who have drawn salaries some time in the past.

When I got home Lena was already back again. She told me about the performance, which seemed to have been a success, about the young lady she had played, and the audience. In the audience there had been a few managers. Lena seemed to take it all simply enough and began to tell me about the people who had come back-stage afterward to see her. One of them had been a woman named Clara Lorraine. Did I know her? Lena asked.

"A woman with a face white as paper and a great red mouth like a burst melon?" I said.

"That's the one!" Lena said, laughing. "And you ought've heard her. 'I was dying to tell you how exquisite you are, my dear. You'll go to the end of the sky, your voice, your movement. You're like glass and lovely water, and music, some one singing!' That's what she said. And she must come to see me. Lafe, what's she like?"

"Well, she has a salon on Ninth Street," I said. "Takes a pinch of drugs, I suppose. She's got one protection, her habits are such as people can't discuss, there's that advantage."

"Don't tell me. I'll take your word for it."

"I wasn't going to tell you any more. Though you'll have to get used to all sorts if you go in for acting."

"We'll forget her."

"But one thing. She was married once some way or other, and has a little boy she's named Sinbad."

Eleanor laughed happily, the rest slipped off her. "The sweet little thing! I'd love to see him, is he sweet?"

"Like a little picture, if only I hadn't seen his father. Too prophetic, I mean, of what he'll look like later. His father looks like a boy poet grown up into a baby."

"I don't care. Sinbad's not like that now," she said.

Presently I reminded Lena that we were going with Judie next day to the Metropolitan Museum, and said good night.

CHAPTER IX

THE next afternoon, at the Metropolitan, Judie said suddenly: "Hal, I adore you, darling, but what are you looking so hot in the eyes about now, eh?"

"Well," I said hotly, "really, I'm wondering who the artist is going to paint for in America." We had been standing looking at the Veronese in the long room at the top of the stair. "After all, the artist does paint to the senses. The idea must be there, the soul of the picture, of course. But how are you going to respond to it except through the senses? And for that you've got to have senses."

Judie said, "Yes, professor."

She was leading the way through the next rooms at the Metropolitan and down the back stairs to the tea-room.

"But apropos of what all this?"

"Of the Veronese," I said.

"The Venus and Mars, of course."

"Yes. Cupid binding Venus and Mars together. Divine picture!"

"Oh, I don't know, Hal."

"It's loose Venetian drawing, I admit. Venus is lineless and I suppose the knee of that leg she presents to Mars is not right."

"But is presenting your knee to a gentleman right? Is it moral? I ask you. So Veronese painting it wrong is only Wagnerian; if you have a rotten emotion, you must make a rotten sound," Judie said.

"And the horse's figure is a bit sketchy as horse. But the Mars is magnificent. And what magnificent texture! And the underpainting, what lustre!"

"Take your tray, darling," Judie said.

We took our trays and made our choices, passing along behind the brass bars of the food counter, paid as we entered, and sat down at one of the cafeteria tables.

"Sad food here," Judie said.

Three young painters with little beards, wayward hair, wide, soft collars, and other accessories revolutionary in a democratic country, stopped their conversation at the next table and began to stare at Eleanor. One of them, a thin young man with black hair, his fingers stained with Zinnabar green, put down his cup and spreading out his arms rested his palms on the table-corners. He sat looking at Lena as if she were one of the pictures on the wall up-stairs.

To escape the line of their eyes she turned to me.

"But, Hal, I see the Veronese, but what is it about the American artists? What were you going to say?"

"Who they were going to paint for?" Judie said.

"I was looking at those men I saw in front of the Veronese. It was when you and Judie were at the Frans Hals. A tall man, about thirty, with light-brown hair, thin on the crown, sallow, pale skin, hook nose. He followed my eyes and gave the picture a thoughtful glance for a moment, then turned away. A second later two young fellows passed, elbows linked; they looked at Mars and Venus as they walked by chattering. Then there was a married couple. Very gentle and decent-looking—a clergyman, I imagine. And his wife, yellowed and faded, plainly a born lady. She gave every one she saw a sharp look. They came up, read the title, gave Veronese a moment's cold observation. And one more couple, young. He had his arm through his wife's,

who was rather taller than he was. They stood before Veronese but hardly looked; they were pleasantly talking to each other as they wandered along doing the Museum. The painting was nothing to him, but at least he looked husky."

"Yes, but he had his wife's scarf around his neck," Lena put in.

"And your lesson is?" Judie asked.

"My lesson is that if these idle, energetic creatures with washed-out senses and ready-made tastes are what we have to paint for, what are we going to paint?"

"Watered landscapes?" Judie said. "Fishing-scenes, of course. House-fronts with white columns. Pictures all chalky, as if they had been painted by the milkman. They're things here like that, bought out of some fund for modern American art. See?"

The young men had left and a large rosy woman had taken their table. She had two children with her, a little boy of seven and a child who climbed on to her lap. Her broad, innocent face was like some madonna's, the madonna of corn bread, I thought, rich with the fruitful, warm soil, lovely with her own human goodness and fruit. I forgot my pessimism over the thin senses of the American male. I could feel the peace of harvest-time, when the ripe sheaves are in the field, the odor of fresh stubble, the warm twilight.

"But I suppose it will work out. Life finds the right art for itself," I said, quite calmed down.

"Yes, it does not!" Judie said.

Half-way up the stairs Lena turned to me. "Well, what shall we have for American art, Hal?"

"No use to ask," Judie interrupted. "The rosy family has made him optimistic."

Lena repeated her question. "What then? What must we have?"

"That," I said, suddenly, as we heard music sounding through the place.

"Music?"

"Life moving in music. Art moving in music," I said. "Look! Listen!"

All in the big rooms and halls and galleries the sound of an orchestra rose. They were rehearsing for a concert; the orchestra was in some upper balcony in the entrance-hall.

The music filled the place. It gave life everywhere. The statues rising before us became exalted. We walked among them like gods.

"I understand," Lena said. "I understand, Hal." She put her hand on my shoulder for a moment.

We walked along in the music and turned down the entrance-hall to the Greek marbles. The room was full of statues, figures of athletes, nymphs, gods and goddesses; the highest of all was the fifth-century stele in the centre of the gallery. The music that the orchestra played was Haydn, something with a clear pattern, sufficient volume, and the antique grace. The statues seemed to soar, to stand straight in the bright air, to be lifted up. They shone with the music.

Lena had walked ahead a little and was near the statue of the votary farther down the gallery, the figure with its body of a strong youth and its lifted hands. Far down at the other end, from out the Pompeian garden, a party of tourists crowded in on the heels of a lecturer, a woman in a sort of tunic embroidered in Slavic patterns and a hat of the same stuff built up in bands around her head; I could see her large, sober ears beneath it.

"We shall go now to the Cretan frescos," she said, as she marched forward toward a door along the wall. "Paintings from the island of Crete." Her audience followed.

I turned from watching them and saw Judie's eyes laughing at me.

"Well?" I asked.

"I was just wondering what you're thinking, professor?"

"Well, if you want to know," I said, "I was thinking about that art class that just went by. I suppose none of them know good art from bad. The difference is, some of them won't dislike the good when it's pointed out to them."

Suddenly from beyond the votive figure we saw a man who had stopped and was looking up at it. Judie had seen him before I did; she made a gasping sound.

"My God!"

"What?" I said.

"Look what the music's done! He's walking out of something. Out of some frame."

Judie was excited. She went on whispering at me. "Look at that, Hal; your artists in America can paint for him, cheer up! Oh, my God! But he's really not so handsome. I suppose if the music would stop I'd get my senses back."

I turned to see if Lena had seen Arthur also. She was looking at him where he stood on the other side of the statue and he at her; they had met in the magnificent world of that moment.

"Let's join Lena," I said. "I'll present him. It's Arthur Lane."

Arthur bowed very low as I presented him to Lena; people looking into the gallery might have

thought him a European. Lena blushed slightly and held out her hand.

"I'm delighted to see you," he said in his clear, warm voice.

I presented Arthur to Judie.

"I was looking at you. I'd like to paint you," she said, shaking his hand too cordially.

"How do you do?" Arthur said.

His tone was cool. Judie had dashed at him with too much of the intimate and engaging. I knew by Arthur's tone that she had taken the wrong tack. This studio way of charming was the last thing in the world that he liked.

"As soon as I saw you I said I'd like to paint you, didn't I, Hal?"

"I believe you did," I said, hoping she would drop it; Judie was never very quick to get what people thought of her.

"I'm afraid I'd be making a poor return for the pleasure of meeting you," Arthur replied.

He turned, smiling, to Lena. "Is this your favorite spot in the Museum? I like sculpture much better than painting."

"Do you?" she said.

"And the Greek most."

"We've been looking at the Veronese, and Hal was in despair because the public who looked at it were all so peaked and thin-blooded. But the tea seemed to encourage him, didn't it, Lafe?"

"No, the rosy family," Judie cut in.

"Lafe?" Arthur asked. He was puzzled by the name.

"Me," I said.

"But——"

"Lena's called me that for a lifetime. I'm supposed to look like the Marquis de Lafayette—to Lena at any rate."

"You're about as much like Mr. Gladstone," Judie said.

"Then you are old friends?"

"We came up in the same town."

"We both came up in Mississippi."

"Then we are neighbors too," Arthur said, speaking again only to Lena. "Kentucky is my habitat."

"Kentucky!" Lena exclaimed, and shook hands with him again. "Hal never told me. Hal, you've never——"

"And so we all came up in those bright parts," Arthur went on.

"As you'd know by the *came up*," Judie said.

"Came up?"

"You *grow up* everywhere else."

"Oh, I see."

"But not you-all," Judie laughed. "Not you-all."

A guard approached to ask Lena kindly not to touch.

"Oh, I'm so very sorry," she said, blushing again and smiling. She had rested her hand on the marble pedestal.

"That's all right, miss." The guard grinned at her.

"There, I see my chatter is getting you into trouble," Arthur said, and as he laughed he showed his white, fine teeth. "I've a companion strayed somewhere," he went on. "I hope I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again." He bowed to Lena and then to Judie.

"Will you come to see us?" Eleanor said. "Hal, you must bring Mr. Lane to see us."

I promised and we all shook hands.

"Dudensing is around somewhere," Arthur said. "He's an ancient habitué of the room from Boscoreale. You know Dudensing, Hal."

"Yes," I said. "Judie, Dudensing's an architect."

"Then we shall meet?" Arthur said, eagerly. Eleanor smiled and held out her hand again.

Judie turned to us laughing as we walked on—it had managed to dawn on her that Arthur was not, to put it gently, to be a follower. "Well, my pretties, I might be said to be a little damp, no? What a priss! Hal, why's he stuffy like that?"

"You mean?"

"I mean that 'requiting poorly the pleasure' and so forth. If that isn't stuffy——"

"It's a sort of Southern formality he's inherited. Gives him a sort of elegance sometimes. Sometimes just tiresome. Falls back on it to defend himself. Arthur's got no humor. But proud, oh, proud!"

"Well, he wasn't proud of my favors."

"Arthur doesn't like artists."

"Saves my face."

"Doesn't fancy the artistic temperament."

"Well, I don't give a hang, do I? As an artist I say that black hair and long brown eyes and white skin, rosy around the eyes, is rough on a girl. That biggish nose has style, too." She sighed.

"Who is he, Hal?" Lena asked, her eyes shining with pleasure.

"He's at Columbia. Two years, this is his second year. He's taking his doctor's degree and has some teaching, some Freshman English."

"Just that?" Lena asked.

"Yes. He writes some poetry."

"Is it good? Is his poetry good, Hal?"

"I at least think so. I like it. But it's not very modern. I'll bring some to show you."

"I'd love to see it."

"All right. He's thirty."

"You've never spoken of him."

"Never thought of it somehow, I reckon."

"I'm sure I'd hate him," Judie reflected. "Much too period for me."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Just what I say. Can't explain. Period."

Near the entrance on the right we stopped at a stone base to look at the inscription and the translation of it. We spelled out the sprawling lines of the Greek and saw that they were written backward, from right to left. None of us had known that Greek was ever written so, and we were talking of that when Arthur joined us again. Dudensing was with him.

"You are here still?" he said, making a little bow. "We are fortunate."

I shook hands with Dudensing and introduced him to Judie and Eleanor.

"We are going to take another look at the Pompeian Garden. Only a coup d'œil," he said, putting in a little of his Beaux-Arts French. "We can't believe they could have perpetrated that mud red when they had the Boscoreale room to go by."

"Pretty damn good, that Greek red," Judie said.

Dudensing smiled, "It's the joy of my life."

I read out the inscription on the stone:

"Chairedemos set up this monument to the dead Amphicrates, mourning a good son. Paidimos made it."

Lena turned quickly to Arthur. "Isn't it beautiful!" she said. She was much moved.

His eyes were on her face. "And now Chairedemos is gone too," he said. "And Amphicrates is gone and Paidimos, and the monument itself is gone, and only the lines remain." Then he added, quickly, trying to change into a casual tone, "Do you know, the epigrams I like best in the anthology are those about children: 'Philip, his father, laid here the twelve-year-old child, his high hope, Nicotoles,' that's one. Though why I should like these so, I don't know; children mean nothing to me."

"No?" Lena said.

"Unless perhaps a son when one is old."

"Yes," Judie said, "it's hard to stage old age very well without children."

But Arthur either did not feel the thrust or he was in too good spirits to notice Judie.

He stood for a moment looking at the inscription on the broken base, from which the statue was long since gone.

"I know them only in English, of course, but I like every poem in the anthology," he said to Lena.

"I know what it is," she said. "We like their—" she turned to me, with her gentle smile.

"—elegy," I said.

Lena said, "Yes, Lafe's word, the elegy of them. Because they give us peace."

"Darling!" Judie said, suddenly, with tears in her eyes, as if Lena had been a child, and what could she need with peace?

Lena was looking down; she made no answer, and busied herself with her glove. Soon afterward we said good-by to Arthur and his companion and left.

"It's a good thing for the other guy we left the building when we did," Judie said, when the taxi had started down Fifth Avenue, "or Mr. Lane would have done nothing but keep coming back to tell us good-by."

"One thing you'll have to admit," Lena said, "it was divine reading Greek verses with music playing."

Judie burst out laughing as she caught Lena around the neck and kissed her.

"You darling, oh, you darling! The music had stopped before we even started to the Greek inscription. Hadn't it, Hal? Hadn't it?"

Lena turned to me.

"Had the music stopped, Hal?"

I nodded.

"Well, what if it had!"

She began to talk in her sweet, bright voice. All the way down-town she kept laughing and talking. She told some of the stories about the family negroes in Mississippi that Judie loved to make her tell; she put little flashes of pantomime into them, making gestures with her lovely hands. She told about Aunt Callie, her old nurse, whose right name was Caledonia; and about a boy whose name was Jezebel—he was called Jersey Bell. He and his brother Shoat used to sing together; Jersey Bell, who was almost a pigmy, had a great voice like a bullfrog's.

Lena was full of happy thoughts. I could see that without planning it exactly she was bent on drawing Judie around to her.

"No doubt Mr. Lane is heavenly," Judie said finally. Nobody had mentioned Arthur's name.

"Well, Judie?" I laughed.

"Is the other gentleman to be heavenly too? What's his name, Hal?"

"Dudensing."

"Funny name!"

"It's a name," I said, "that always seemed to me a bit disconcerting, except in a nursery perhaps."

"You mean the world—dudensing?"

"It sounds like a baby's little affairs."

Judie burst out laughing and then was for developing the idea into various little infantile obscenities, but we had to tell the driver how to find the Samarkand in 54th Street. We wanted to dine where there was music and where people would sit on after dinner as if they came for the place itself and not as a stop on their way to something else.

When we had eaten dinner Judie took her coffee and went over to join one of those friends of hers that she was eternally meeting; this time it was a painter who had the corner table. They sat talking in low voices, and Lena and I were quiet, absorbed with our thoughts. The musicians played all evening; they were four Russians; two of them had guitars, one a mandolin, and one a violin. Their music made me think of the time when I went from Brindisi to Greece. It was a little Greek boat, and at night on deck people were playing on violins and mandolins and guitars and singing. I stretched out on the benches and lay there with the sails and the awning cloths flapping overhead in the dim light, and the sound of the sea going past and the music.

CHAPTER X

THREE days before Thanksgiving and two weeks after the try-out Eleanor had a letter from Kelly summoning her to his office; he had seen her at the Orchard Theatre and was about to start casting his new play, *The Rose Sleep*. He would be pleased if she would arrange to be on hand at ten-thirty the next morning, Tuesday.

Tuesday morning she came up to my room to tell me and ask if I would go with her.

"Of course," I said. "It's fine."

"I wished he hadn't asked me just this morning," she said; "we're terribly busy here getting out my heavier things and packing the summer ones. Mrs. Norton's helping me. She's the one brought up Mr. Kelly's letter, and now she's been telling me about the divorces of the stage people. She reads them in the papers."

"But, Lena, aren't you excited?" I said.

"Oh, about Mr. Kelly? Oh, yes, mighty excited."

"Use your imagination," I said; "some day you'll know what this means."

"Oh, I do," she said.

But the truth was that something had happened to Lena that thousands of people in the theatre were selling themselves to get, were scheming, paying agents, anything that seemed to serve; and here she was, too ignorant of the theatre to know that a great chance might be in store for her.

I came back from Columbia to Kelly's office, and Lena arrived five minutes after me and two minutes late perhaps, not more; and stretched her eyes to see

that the anteroom to Kelly's office was full of people sitting in chairs along the walls and standing, two or three of them, by a window talking. There were eight or ten women and as many men; some were in their twenties, some past thirty. There was not one who did not look quickly up when Lena appeared; a newcomer meant only more competition. They were trying not to appear self-conscious, poor creatures; but every one felt the suspense of the moment, which meant fame, or at least a living, for them, meant rivalries, publicity, food for their vanity, a chance to air themselves and be seen by the world. Some of them were vibrantly dressed, all the newest fashions and novelties in gloves, jewelry, and coats. Some of them, especially among the men, were almost shabby, they had worn clothes, often cheap from the start, that now looked pressed and careful, with a fresh extravagance in the necktie. If any of these men was bald he wore a toupee, if any old he kept up his airs like an old horse drugged for the market. It was a strange sight and heart-breaking, these faces so full of egotism and often silliness. Among the older actors there was that expression of empty precision by which, a generation ago, you knew the professional when you saw him.

Each one of these players gathered in Kelly's outer room had his story, successful or unfortunate, but never quite true; for they were people of the theatre and drama pursued them to the grave, which itself would yawn at last wider and deeper than ever before for any one else, to swallow them up. They were only children, grown up now, with an inborn desire, and sometimes a talent, for exhibiting themselves.

Our chairs were in the shadow to the right of the door into the office; the more effective and striking places had been taken before Lena arrived. Next to Lena sat a fat blond girl, of twenty perhaps, in a raccoon coat and a small hat all made of ostrich feathers. She lit a cigarette, putting it first into a green holder, and turned to Eleanor. I had made up my mind to keep out of everything and to be quiet till we had wound up the morning.

"Dearie, what have you played on Broadway?"

"Nothing," Eleanor said.

"On the road?"

"No."

"Never been on?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Gee! You think you'll get something in this here *Rose Sleep*?"

"Well, I suppose I'd like it. I had a letter."

"Who's your agent? My name's Bowen; May Bowen, what's yours?"

"Eleanor Dandridge, thank you."

"Thank *you*. Eleanor, you're surely swell-looking enough, we got to hand you that, whether you're Sarah Bernhardt or not. Who's your agent?"

Eleanor did not understand.

"Do I have an agent?" she asked innocently.

"Say, I mean who sent you here to try for this play? You got word?"

"Mr. Kelly wrote and asked me to come."

"Oh!" May was astonished.

"He saw me in a try-out two weeks ago at the Orchard Theatre."

"Oh?" May said, her voice cooling with the professional's contempt. "Art theatre."

"Is it?" Eleanor asked.

"What the hell! Dearie, be yourself!"

"Well. You see——"

"Well, anyhow I wish they'd get on with it," May Bowen added. "All I got on's this frock, see——" She lifted her skirt to show the bare knee above the stocking——" just got out of bed and slipped it on, my place is in Forty-sixth Street right near. So I got to keep this coat on or freeze, and it's so damned hot. I think I'm having my tonsils out this afternoon, so I wish he'd get this over." She was interrupted by a young man's coming into the room. He was Jewish in type—a blond Jew, handsome enough, and looked as if he drank too much and never had enough sleep; his hat rested on one ear.

The young man walked around the room, stopping to scrutinize each of the actors. He said to one of them, "I'm sorry"; to another, "I'm sorry"; to another, "I'm sorry"; he said that to about half the people in the room, and they rose and began to gather up their belongings and go out; some of them said, "Thank you," as if speaking to fate; some showed a front of indifference, or a certain pre-occupation, as if to say they had other matters far more interesting ahead. The young man came to Miss Bowen, who evidently knew him. She shook hands.

"How d'y'do, Mr. Fitzgerald?" she said. Eleanor was surprised that his name should be Fitzgerald.

"Hello, May," he said. "No, I'm sorry," he added, looking at her.

"Won't do? Too fat for this heroine?"

He nodded, as he lit a cigar.

"Sorry."

"These damned agents!" she said. "Why did they

send me? They knew. My God, you can see when anybody's fat, can't you? Just think they've got to throw you something now and then. What about the other parts?"

"Sorry."

"Aw, be yourself! Goo'-by. By-by, Dandridge."

"This is Miss Dandridge?" Mr. Fitzgerald said, shaking hands.

"Yes."

He turned to the room, where half the people still waited. "Well, will everybody kindly wait—just a minute! Mr. Kelly wants to hear the parts read."

He went out, leaving the door to the office open. We could hear a conversation going on inside and from the corners of our eyes could see three men, middle-aged, sitting and talking. One of them Lena recognized as Kelly, whom she had had pointed out to her through the curtain peep-hole at the Orchard Playhouse.

"But even if I have a good show I can't get a theatre to bring it to town in. Not one."

"It's a great season, George," another voice was saying; "never better. Three of my shows are sold out solid all the time. I should worry."

"Well, Kelly, I'll tell you, I've got a fine play; it's a great success everywhere on the road, but what's the good of it when you can't get a theatre?"

A third voice broke in, high, in an accent like some little tailor's on the Bowery.

"If you got the play, you can get the theatre all right."

"I haven't found it so," George went on again petulantly. "I'll swear, what I think I'll do is take a ship and go round the world. No use staying here. What can a man do?"

Kelly tried to be consoling. "Oh, you'll be all right, George; you'll be all right; you'll see."

"No, I'll take a cruise. I'll just take passage on the *Biancamano*."

"Ah, George!" Kelly said, remonstrating.

And that third person began again.

"It's a good theatre season," he said.

"No. That's what I'd better do. Take the *Biancamano* next month," George said.

"Well, she's a lovely little vessel all right."

After this there was a silence, during which one of the producers struck a match. A slender, dark woman, whom we recognized as Kate James, came through the anteroom and went in, closing the door behind her. She was one of those women in the theatre who marry men so much older than themselves and seem content with the relationship, since their passion is not love but getting on in their careers. They find these men, no doubt, steady havens to be depended upon. Perhaps, too, their actress egotism welcomes in an older lover the lack of that competition and strain that a younger lover brings. Seeing the delicate lady pass through the room, Lena wondered how she could have brought herself to marry such an old codger as Kelly. What she did not know was that Miss James herself had begun no farther up than her husband; this polish of hers had derived from the practice of her art and the necessity for dainty airs in the rôles she played.

Twenty minutes passed; the room grew quiet and a little more tense. Lena had no idea of the czardom holding in these places, the mechanical system used. She got up and knocked at the door. Kelly came to the door.

"I'm sorry, but I can't stay here all day," she said, "I'm cleaning out my closets."

The unprofessional innocence of that did not displease Kelly.

"Why, Miss Dandridge, we didn't know you were here. Come in. You oughter knocked."

Eleanor introduced me as a friend who had come along with her, and seemed oblivious of the interpretation that Kelly would put on my presence. He doubtless would have called me the "boy friend" of the young lady and let it go at that. He shook hands and offered me a chair. We saw that one of the company had left, but the little man with the high voice was there still. When he was introduced to Lena the voice deepened and the accent became very cultivated—he was another man.

"How do you do?" he said.

Kelly gave Eleanor the script of the play. She began to look through it.

"Can you do the part, Miss Dandridge?" he asked, when he had allowed her a moment's study of the manuscript.

"Why, yes," she said, "of course. There's nothing to do; it's just an ordinary person, isn't it?"

"Well, get that!" he exclaimed, and then seemed rather interested by this young lady's cool opinion of his heroine. "However, no matter. Now will you please read some of it, Miss Dandridge?"

Lena objected that she knew nothing of the scene, of what it all meant. She did not even know what or who was being answered by those speeches she had to read. How could she read intelligently? But the producers seemed to put great store by the method, which at bottom consisted in handing the actor a

script, having him read a passage at first sight, and then judging his fitness for the rôle.

She read half a page, and the two men sat watching as Kelly interrupted.

"That's all right, I guess," he said. "You'd do it."

He called Mr. Fitzgerald and told him that the part was cast and the others could go. Mr. Fitzgerald opened the door and leaning half out of it announced that he was sorry to say there would be no more try-outs for the female lead this morning. The second female part only. The gentlemen present might come back in the afternoon if they chose; Mr. Kelly would see them then. He shut the door.

Kelly turned to Eleanor again.

"Lissen, Miss Dandridge; this character's got to be a lady, you understand?"

The little man spoke up:

"Ah, Tom, don't you see Miss Dandridge is a lady? She don't have to worry about that."

"Well, that's all right; no harm done I guess," Kelly said, cocking his pale eyes.

He called Mr. Fitzgerald and told him to bring Eleanor her script, the sides for Claire.

"How many of them are there?" he asked.

"Ninety," Mr. Fitzgerald said.

Eleanor looked at the script to see; there were ninety-eight pages, rather small, typed out and bradded into a sheaf.

"That's a good many sides, Eleanor," Kelly said. "Got a good memory, darling?"

"I suppose so," she answered; "it's nothing to learn this, I should think."

"All right, darling; have it your way. Mr. Fitzgerald will tell you about rehearsals. By-by, we'll

try to see you through. The thing to do now is to get some pictures made. Fitzgerald will tell you about that—going to White's and so on. We'll see how you photograph. She ought to photograph all right, oughtn't she?"

"Oh, she'll photograph good," Mr. Fitzgerald said.

Kelly took his cigar out of his mouth. "By the way, we haven't talked about our finances. What do you think?"

"I hadn't thought," Eleanor said. "I hadn't thought about it, Mr. Kelly."

"Well, of course, you're a beginner, Miss Dandridge. No experience."

"I couldn't be worse than some who have had it, not from what I've been seeing on Broadway."

"Well, by God, lissen!"

Mr. Fitzgerald smiled, not sure what line he ought to take.

"But it won't do any harm, I guess," Kelly went on; "this Ritzing . . ."

"I don't think I mean it for that. I only meant . . ."

"I know what you meant. My wife would say the same thing—Miss James; she was just in here."

"I saw her," Eleanor said, "I love her; to play like her is another matter."

"I hope so," Kelly said. "However, as I was saying, this Ritzing won't do any harm; goes with your type, I guess. Don't it, Fitzgerald?"

Mr. Fitzgerald agreed.

"But the salary?" Kelly went on. "Of course it's not so swell, but you're just starting. Two hundred is what I thought right."

He looked over at Mr. Fitzgerald, who appeared to be already nodding his head in agreement.

Eleanor had heard theatre talk at least enough to know that this was no crashing salary for a leading part, but she was astonished just the same. Two hundred a week seemed a great deal for the first money you ever earned.

"Is that satisfactory?" Kelly was asking.

"Oh, yes, quite," she said. "I hadn't thought about it. I suppose I should thank you."

"'S all right." Kelly was not sure what Eleanor was feeling, and so stood there chewing the end of his cigar and studying her.

The truth was that Lena had not even yet taken in what it all meant. If she appeared condescending, it was not because she was trying to impress the producer or felt too good for the occasion. It was that she had not found her way. This simple piece—she could see in a few glimpses into her script how simple it was—made no impression. The fact that it was by a very successful playwright made no impression. She was not child enough of the theatre to stop at his Broadway reputation; she only felt that if he could write this kind of thing he must be a simple being. Nor did it occur to her that these naïve and simple creatures who were producing the play were important people; Kelly soared in the newspapers and at the actors' clubs, but she would never have thought of it. And what he offered her, this first chance and a leading rôle, with an opening night ahead that the dramatist's name would make an event—crowded pavements, competition for seats, newspaper reports with lists of those present—what Kelly offered her she had not had enough of theatrical

New York to be overwhelmed by. She was wondering what her heroine wished repeated where the first line said, "Tell me again"—the script she had been given showed only Claire's speeches.

Kelly thought that Lena was out to impress him—that was the way his world went and how his mind worked in the midst of it. But he did not object; Dandridge's being a bit up-stage would never matter; he already intended if she went well in *The Rose Sleep* to make her a star.

"Now I guess you'd better stay a while," he said, "and see about casting Vivian. Vivian's a girl who was pretty loose, I guess, and tried to take Claire's lover away from her. Just sit down, Miss Dandridge."

Eleanor sat down near the window.

"Le' see, she's got to be a blonde, to set off you; with you dark we got to have a blonde. Who in hell's a blonde?"

"How about May Bowen?" Eleanor asked.

"Not so bad."

"She's blonde."

"Blonde is right. Friend of yours?"

Lena said she had met Miss Bowen in the ante-room. Kelly instructed Mr. Fitzgerald to try and see if Miss Bowen was back at her hotel, tell her to come over, and meanwhile start the others in.

The first was a small, dark girl of twenty perhaps, pinched and keen-looking. She was obviously not good for the part. But the try-out was gone through with. Kelly gave her the script for Vivian.

"Just read the speeches on the last page," he said. "You say you've been in stock in Boston?"

The girl said she had had two years in stock, in Cleveland and Boston. Kelly let her read the page, which had four speeches.

"Thank you," he said, "but I guess you wouldn't make a good foil to Miss Dandridge. See you again for another part soon. Good morning."

The girl bowed and went out, as another candidate for the part appeared with Mr. Fitzgerald. She was a woman of forty, with broad jaws and high cheek-bones, and an expression of fighting her way. She looked like a woman who had been born to be concerned with babies and potatoes, but had been shifted somehow on to intellectual analyses. She spoke as if she were lecturing.

"Miss Elison," said Mr. Fitzgerald.

"Morning, Miss Elison," Kelly said.

"Good morning."

"No," Kelly went on, shaking his head; hardly the type, hardly the type for the part."

"Mr. Kelly, I've studied the character. Mr. Mallet is a friend of mine. He sent me to see you. I'm very much interested in the character; I know I can do it, Mr. Kelly. I think I understand it."

"Hardly the type we have in mind, Miss Elison; sorry. We'll hope for something in my next play. Good morning."

"But it's not very fair, is it, to refuse to let me read the part? I'm entitled to that. I think you should allow me to read it."

Kelly turned to Mr. Fitzgerald.

"Let Miss Elison have Vivian's sides, Lena. Last page, please, Miss Elison."

Miss Elison read:

"Gee, it's somethin' fierce, this dump."

And then:

"You're a decent kid, I guess. But you just didn't exactly know your own mind. You didn't like me—

I should worry, I got my papa in New York City, New York."

"That's in the second act, everybody. Vivian's not in after that."

"I know it," Miss Elison said, and read the last speech:

"So I'm done, see? I'm on my way to town, and oh, won't I stay in town! By-by."

Miss Elison read like a lecture on the part. She was one of those players that can describe what is meant by a rôle but could never act it. This profundity of hers made the wretched lines seem sillier than ever.

"Yes, thank you," Kelly said.

"I should like to have the chance to try that part," Miss Elison said.

"Will you kindly leave us your address, where we can get you on the phone?"

Miss Elison looked him square in the face a moment, challenging his sincerity.

"Spring 0077," she said.

"Thank you. Good morning."

She bowed stiffly.

"There's a cow mama for you," Kelly growled. "These author's friends! How do you suppose he sees the part himself?"

"Sees you getting rid of her, doing his dirty work for him," Mr. Fitzgerald said. "God!"

A tall girl came in with long dark eyes and brown hair plastered tight down on her beautiful skull. She made her face white as paper; the large, sensuous mouth was very red. Her neck was slender and from her little ears, painted like pink shells, hung long Russian earrings of gold. She was smartly dressed in

black, cut to a low V in front, with a brown fur around her shoulders. She looked indifferent—as if she knew that her future was already taken care of—smiled as she bowed to Kelly, and showed the small, shining teeth.

Kelly looked at her.

“No, Miss Ramson,” he said; “too tall. I’m afraid you’re too tall for the part.”

Miss Ramson narrowed her eyes and turned on her heel, before she said, cuttingly: “It’s the first time I ever heard that your height had anything to do with your being a prostitute.”

Miss Bowen read two or three sides of Vivian’s part as if she had acted it for months. The character seemed to come alive as she read, in an odd impish voice that took the ear at once. She carried the script away with her.

“She’s good, Mr. Kelly,” Eleanor said. “Isn’t she good? I’d think she had studied the part.”

Kelly nodded.

“Good, yes. She’s quite a kid, Bowen. But she reads it now as well as she ever will. When you’ve been in this business as long as I have, you’ll know that these people who do like that at first sight don’t get much farther. Just go on doing what they did at the start.”

“Really?”

“Usually. Most times. Only they get worse usually.”

CHAPTER XI

THE rehearsal, that first day, of *The Rose Sleep* ended in fine good humor because a cat had walked across the stage, which every one regarded as a sign of good luck.

I was there sitting in the back seats of the darkened house. Mr. Larson, the director, cordially enough invited me to stay if I chose—any friend of Miss Dandridge's, he said.

To this Mr. Clarence Larson was intrusted the directing of Kelly's plays; he had long since given up the labor of that himself. He found them, cast them, and sold them to the public. Mr. Larson was a young man of twenty-four who had come out of the West, with two years of work in Hollywood behind him. He was tall, very lean, with thick black hair and a face like a seal. He had little knowledge of acting and less cultivation of any kind. But from Hollywood life, doubtless, he had energy and noise; and the moving-picture work had developed his talent for herding, mass-commotion and what he called punch and putting it over. On the very first day of *The Rose Sleep* rehearsals, he did what you could see was his trick of flying off the handle and giving a violent exhibition of temperament. Two of the actors were talking in the wings and missed their cues for coming in and reading what they had in the script. One of them had to say, "It's time to go"; the other said, "And we're all set, out here, to help you," after which they were to make their exit.

The actors did not come on at their cues. Mr. Larson sprang up from his chair and kicked it across the stage. It crashed through one of the canvas flats. He began to curse and to shout. It was an enormous voice to come from that small, purple mouth. What he wanted, he said, was playing ball, not loafing on the job. If the company wouldn't get to work on the play, he said, he'd walk out. He refused to sit down again when the property manager brought him another chair, but remained standing for the rest of the morning; he smoked one cigarette after another and threw them jerkily away when they were half through.

I knew that after such noise and insults Lena would think, like a good Southerner, that Mr. Larson would kill somebody or some man there would knock him down. I could see her watching the other players to see what was the proper thing to do. But all that happened was that the two culprits asked his pardon, and then the company stood around and waited till Mr. Larson had finished his tirade. They knew that this was only another way of showing them at the start that if there was going to be any temperament around, he had as much as any one.

The male lead for *The Rose Sleep* was a long-waisted young actor with good shoulders and chest and a good flat back, and legs that were too short. He had a mouth like Washington's and eyes rather far apart, which gave him a kind of Colonial, virtuous look. This he heightened with a ruddy out-of-door make-up. His general air was placid, though at intervals he was manly or gentle. He gave you a picture of himself that suggested constancy and health. He made the audience quite tired, but at

the same time bluffed them with this effect of self-control and morality, from which their minds, intimidated and confused with popular moral platitudes, were unable to defend them. It was only instinctive with him, but there was something ironical about the way he held them up with their own pet virtues; they could not desert Self-Control, Health, Good Teeth, Service, and Sexual Morality, and so were forced to indorse him. Tweeds suited him, and careless good woollens. His name was Gordon Gordon.

Besides the hero and May Bowen's blond prostitute, the only other part of any account was an old neighbor of the heroine's, a family friend, who was always saying: "You've got no mother and I'll try to take her place." This part was played by Agnes Williams, an actress of fifty-five or more, a great favorite with her public, who laughed at the first sound of a voice that went from a sort of scraping bass to a high falsetto like a parrot. I had heard much about her. She painted the town red by night and dozed by day; at any minute when she was not in the scene or talking with the director she would slip away and lie down in one of the aisles of the darkened theatre and go to sleep. People were always stumbling over her. She dressed so recklessly that her friends used to take her out and make her buy a frock now and then, and one day some of them had taken her out to a phenomenal sale and bought her ten hats at twenty-five cents apiece.

The old father was played by a well-known actor of the old school, Herbert Anthony, whose voice Lena and I had heard in Kelly's waiting-room; it seemed to come from down between his knees, like a sepulchral bull.

In the rehearsal Lena seemed to me, from where

I sat and looked on, as much at home as the others. All of them did the same thing: walked around the stage with their scripts in their hands, reading when their cues came, being told where to stand by the director, where to cross from one side to the other, often for no reason that any one could see except to cross. They were told where to smile and how to feel about their speeches and actions. And it was then that they learned for the first time what the play was about; hitherto they had known only one character. Even at that you could see that some of the players in the minor parts were indifferent to the story. They paid no attention to scenes they had no share in; doubtless they would find out everything in time.

What with his tantrum and the preliminary instructions for the various rôles, Mr. Larson got only to the end of the first act by lunch time, and I learned only that much of the story.

The scene of *The Rose Sleep* was laid in Vermont, in a village far north, at the foot of a mountain and near the great lumber-camps. An old man, Adam Vincent, has a little dry-goods and notions store. The stage scene showed the store to your left, the family sitting-room to the right, with a wall between running down to the footlights. The mother is dead, the father has saved money and sent his daughter Claire to Vassar. She is at home again after her graduation. It is summer; Joey Langdon talks with her father in the store; he is going to New York to seek his fortune; a dealer in building-materials has offered him a position that promises well. Claire comes into the sitting-room and Joey follows to say good-by. They pledge undying faith to one another. Before the New Year he will return.

That was all I heard, and, even as it was, I was

late at Columbia and had to run away and leave Eleanor to lunch alone at Sardi's. I would see her after dinner.

That night when I joined Lena in Judie's room I found that she had borrowed the script of the play from Larson and brought it home with her. Arthur was there.

"So you learned what happened, Lena, to that lovely Claire?" I said. "Did you go through all of it at the rehearsal?"

"No, only the second act. But we've read it since I got home."

She began to tell me the plot as it goes on after the first scene. We see Claire busy in the store, and the blinds of the sitting-room drawn down. Soon after New Year's her father had died of pneumonia, and she has had to run the little business herself. The manager of the new marble company enters. Since her father's death a great discovery has been made, half the town is above a vein of fine marble, there is something like a boom. The manager wants to buy Claire's property, for the ground only. He offers her an absurd price, a trifle compared to the value. She flatly refuses.

Lena had got so far when Judie broke in:

"But look, Hal, the sweet thing's telling it all in that trusting style as if she didn't know it was rot. So Claire flatly refuses, does she? She does. There is a sharp argument. And right in the midst of it, what happens? Why, what should happen? Joey appears. Having resigned his position in New York—that's the way you tell a plot, you always say *having* done something—he's given up New York and come back home to look after these marble prospects of his. Oh,

but there is a row with the manager, and Joey as good as shows him the door. Then there's Claire. He had not returned at New Year's, and had he not promised, the big stiff? No, Joey says, it was not his fault. The head of the business had refused to let him off, too much business pressure, the head said. Oh, dear. So Joey had stopped writing because Claire's letters had grown so cold. Now could any one believe he couldn't get off just for a week-end. He says he got off at last only by resigning his job. Then what happens? I almost forget," Judie said, "Arthur, what?"

"The marble lords machinate," Arthur said. "They import a rough element, Lithuanians, Sicilians, bootleggers."

"Yes, all around the Claire Joey homes. They try to bully. Nothing doing. A woman appears. Oh, that's where I love it!! She's a blond prostitute with tired feet. She's going to sue Joey for breach of promise. She's deliciously rough. Mademoiselle What t' Hell! Then our Claire shuts the door on Joey. Then the blonde comes back. The manager has tried to rook her—she'll double-cross him. So she tells Claire about the plot they hired her for, to keep Joey from the marble-fields."

"And from protecting Claire," Lena said.

"Yes, nobler motive. There was Claire's marble as well as his. She's danced with Joey in a cabaret, that's all. Claire gives the blonde a ticket back to New York. So Joey is cleared and Claire happy. But she wishes to punish him a little, that's only natural in a fourth act. But she hears a noise outside and Joey bursts in, wounded; some one had shot at him from a hedge. Love and tears. He tells how he's

fought with the manager because the manager wanted him not to tell Claire how much he had paid Joey for his property. But would Joey promise that? He would not."

"The drama ends," Arthur said, "with the two lovers standing in the open door. 'Look,' she says, 'it's all summer roses everywhere. The sleeping world is sweet with their perfume!' Quite unre-served for Vermont."

Lena sighed.

"But see here now," I said, "you all stop making the play out so awful. Lena won't be able to stand it. Honey, don't you mind."

"I know what it's like, Lafe," she said.

"But you've seen only the written part of it, there's the acting and setting to fill it out. Scores of Broadway successes are not a whit better, not as good. You can see the trained hand, anyway."

"Trained for what?" Arthur asked.

"For *The Rose Sleep*."

"Yes," he said. "Yes."

I said: "I imagine there's plenty of craft in the management of the suspense. Good violent contrasts in the moods and crises of the scenes. Good black-leading around the characters, each one hacked out round and plain."

"I'll take your word for it, Lafe," Eleanor said. "And Claire's not so bad."

"No, she's just the average young lady like every other one you see. The author's taken pains she shouldn't be too different from every woman in the audience; that's where he's smart."

"Mr. Eric Mallet," Arthur said. And Judie said: "The great American play."

"That's all right," I said. "That won't keep Lena from putting wonderful things into it."

Three weeks of rehearsals were allowed by the Actor's Equity Association, and Kelly planned to be ready in three. *The Rose Sleep* was to open on the twenty-second of December, three days before Christmas. The rehearsals went steadily on. Every day they began at ten in the morning and, after an hour off for lunch, stopped around five in the afternoon. I was in two or three times and saw parts of them. The actors always seemed tired; they were obliging and tried to do what the director wanted of them; but they had no energy, they brought no vitality to the theatre. The strain of New York told on them, perhaps, and the parties that they were always giving and going to, gin and late hours night after night, took the spring out of them.

After a while I thought I noticed that Gordon Gordon was looking at Lena with dreaming eyes. In the love scenes he seemed to make more of the hand-clasps and embraces than seemed necessary, at least, in rehearsal. I told Judie so.

"Oh, yes," she said, "quite. One day when they were standing in the wings, he said: 'Listen. Am I a bad boy? Or not? Whenever you look at me I have evil thoughts.' Lena only said: 'I don't know what you mean.' Lately he's been taking May Bowen out to lunch and waiting for her at five sometimes."

"Better match for the ass," I said.

"But Gordon's not the only one. Only Mr. Larson's method's different. He tried a dash of ogling, but when it got him nowhere, he spoke up, apropos of nothing at all: 'Listen, girly, whenever you get ready to fall off that Christmas-tree, I'm ready. Just

let me know, remember that.' Lena said she would, thank you."

"Well, that's just a bit of theatre," I said.

"I don't think she minds, don't think she takes it in, she's so busy trying to get something into that heroine of hers."

"Who's spread so thin."

"And so long as she can meet Arthur where he'll be waiting for her at that little Russian tea-room on 44th Street."

"He waits there?"

"He won't call for her at the theatre and he refuses to meet the actors of the company. So there you are."

CHAPTER XII

THE first night of *The Rose Sleep* was a considerable event in the theatre world. Eric Mallet had a following, any play of his would get its share of attention; and *The Rose Sleep*'s advance publicity had been plentiful in newspapers of every grade. Kelly also had a following. For years he had built himself up in the news as a hearty, adventurous fellow who knew how to entertain his public. He was very clever about getting the right people to his first nights, and spared nothing to make the right showing. Four-fifths of the seats were complimentary, the newspaper critics were there of course, but the critics from the weeklies and monthly magazines, who are sent tickets for second nights as a rule, were invited too. Besides these he invited almost any one whose name would be sure to be mentioned in the papers as having been present. The second box on the left Kelly always sent to some friend who could make it the occasion for a dinner-party and bring important-looking people to the theatre. The second box on the right he always presented to some politician like the mayor, some one from Washington, some new figure in aviation, baseball or Hollywood, or some foreign visitor whose boat had just been met by all the reporters in town.

I went with Arthur to the opening, on tickets, however, whose price was doubled.

It was a typical New York first night, not one of the most distinguished, happening every year or two, nor yet one of the lowest, happening now and again,

where the general effect is a sort of lecherous idling around to see the beauties in the chorus, but a typical first night of the notable class.

Crowds stood on the pavement outside, making a lane along the awning that ran from the door to the automobiles streaming up. Inside there were many so-called notables, by which is meant anybody that you hear about, a millionaire, a moving-picture actress, the hostess of a night club, a lecturing Englishman, a society lady with a house at Palm Beach, any one whose name the man in the street has read in his paper; all serve as celebrities. There was a great whirring of motors and talking and people greeting one another; the air was strong with powders and perfumes.

Drifting about town, I had been to four or five openings during the season and as soon as I took my seat at *The Rose Sleep* I recognized many of the professional first-nighters. You could have told many of them by the way they looked about from one seat to another, as if checking them up. I saw now the heavy woman in the red velvet cloak with the rolled-back collar. Her grayish hair was cut short and worn in waving clusters, her lips were red as a water-main newly painted. All the women's lips were red, their nails were very rosy, very much varnished; they wore much powder, much scent. A little bald man was always the red-cloak woman's companion. I saw the dark, swollen-looking man with his greedy pale eyes, and the girl walking a little behind him, with her classic profile and long eyelids, and bloated white face. I saw the slim woman whose hair was waved back tight from her brow above the snowy collar of the rabbit coat she always wore, and beside

her the stocky man with the red wig making a line across his pasty, bleached neck. I recognized here and there the pairs of bachelors who come every week to these events. They looked very sleek in their white and black, with their hair plastered down and their feelings rounded out with a good dinner; they were always a little tight. I saw the numberless department-store Spanish shawls, the department-store emeralds, the yards of pearls and diamonds.

Here and there was a gentle face, and now and again a face was handsome or striking if not very fine or subtly bred. There were older people scattered here and there over the house, quiet, sweet faces, waiting for an evening's entertainment, but not many. There were a few college students with young ladies, some hard-looking, some fresh and eager. For the most part, students, sleek clerks, and free young ladies, dining as they chose or making their own living in New York, would be in the balcony, from which many of them would descend in the intermission and walk about looking at people. I saw the young men under twenty-five who came to these first performances; some to be in the swim; some for the chance to have opinions and make judgments before the criticisms in the newspapers had passed on things; some because they were writing plays themselves and could observe here the ways of their ambition and the fortunes of a craft that they meant to capture for themselves if they could. People were standing at the back and the balcony was packed. The critics with their ladies were down toward the front. Farther down still, in the first row, close enough to reach out and touch the footlights, was a dinner-party that stretched from aisle to aisle—most of them

looked a little drunk; the women had long earrings and evening cloaks with fur collars; the men, Continental fashion, kept their top hats on till they reached their places and sat down.

Arthur and I said nothing but sat looking around us. I was trying to outlive the strain and suspense inside me, and wondered how I should survive this performance, in case the curtain ever did go up.

Arthur avoided my eyes and kept turning to look first here and then there over the house.

"My God," he said at last in my ear, "in God's name have you ever seen such people?"

"Pretty God awful," I said.

"Where do they come from?"

"Everywhere," I said. "That's just it."

"And what are the tickets, \$5.80?"

"It's just that everybody can have everything nowadays," I said.

"Ever smell such a reek?" he said. "We can thank Paris for this fragrance."

"Oh, now, there're plenty of decent people here too," I said. "Though it might be better some other night, not a first night."

"I hope so," he said.

"There was a time two decades ago when a first night was a choice event. But, after all, seats can be bought, and those who cannot have distinction can at least have advertisement."

"What I want to know is how the actors stand these people."

"They're not all exquisites themselves," I said.

"I grant you that." His tone was bitter and full of contempt.

"And when a play succeeds, they believe accordingly."

"The irresistible-success argument?"

"The irresistible-success argument. Could any of us withstand it these days?"

"I'll never have to," Arthur said, morosely.

After a few moments, I said: "Look, we don't have to be anxious about Lena's part of it."

"No?"

"No. I saw some of it. She just loses herself in the character, like a trance. And she'll look marvelous."

He still avoided my eyes. "And what about the play?" he said.

I said: "Oh, they'll like it all right."

We said nothing else. It was past the time for the curtain. I nudged Arthur's elbow but he did not raise his eyes when, two rows ahead of us—we were in G—a Frenchwoman stood up and began to wave her hand to some one in the balcony. She was a tall woman with a band of pale gold hair bound about her head like a scarf. With one jewelled hand she held her gold cloak, slipped back from her shoulders; with the other she waved to the friend in the gallery, doubtless imaginary, and smiled a long, langorous smile that showed her large teeth. Her face had been lifted, and her eyes slanted down to her nose like an idol's. People seemed to recognize her. She stood with her eyes looking up, her glittering smile and her hand raised for a long time, as if the attention of whoever that was in the gallery had been very hard to catch. Then she sat down. She was doing her bit of publicity.

The asbestos curtain had gone up, the house was darkened. The footlights came on. I forgot the audience. The old enchantment of the theatre was there.

I was a child sitting before the curtain that would rise on a shining world.

Then I remembered and leaned over to Arthur and touched his hand.

"Look, we're chattering here and forget it's Lena's play."

"I clean forgot it," he said, in a voice that he wanted to sound indifferent. He was still trying to pretend that he was not excited.

"How could we? It's Lena's show. I don't seem to have taken that in yet myself," I said. "Like fools!"

"This mob made me forget," he said. I could feel his hand trembling.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN he knocked at her dressing-room that night half an hour before the curtain, Lena told me, Kelly said to her:

"If the critics treat you rough to-morrow, you mustn't mind. After all, you're a kid, and it's all in the game."

"I don't know what you mean," she said, quite honestly. Kelly talked a little about the reviews and how critics differed among themselves. One critic might say you were wonderful and another you were rotten, he said. But the public judges for itself; if the show has any chance, the public judges for itself, in time. So Kelly said. The way Eleanor took it showed how little she was in the game. She never read the newspapers; perhaps twice a week at the most she went over Judie's papers, which Judie herself read valiantly and often with an upheaval of spirits at what some special writer said. To Lena the newspaper criticisms had not yet become a reality in her theatre world. She told Kelly not to worry over her.

In the middle of the performance he came behind again.

"You're marvellous, darling!" he said. "They're crazy about you. But put your voice down, you're using it way up."

"All right," she said.

"Tell you because I know it won't put you out. Larson says he never saw anybody like you for taking suggestions. You can just change to anything at once. At will, he says—Gordon says never saw anything

like it, says you can do anything. Says you can laugh, cry, quit any piece of business and do a new one—they can't make you out, how you smile, cry——”

“I just do it,” she said. “I'm not crying—I just do it.”

“Well, put your voice down, baby.”

For the rest of the performance she used a lower voice. When Lena told me this, I said I had noticed it and that the effect was more holding and secure. Kelly was right. There were things an old fool like this knew. I had wondered, I said, why she changed.

Out in front we saw the curtain finally come down for the last time and, the performance over, we could breathe again. There was more applause at the last than at either of the two previous curtains, ten or twelve calls, with people turning in the aisles to applaud again. Lena and Gordon Gordon appeared together, then with the company, then together, then Lena, then Gordon, then together, then one after the other, as Kelly had arranged beforehand that they should do. Neither of them was quite a star yet. You said “*The Rose Sleep* with Eleanor Dandridge and Gordon Gordon,” not “Eleanor Dandridge and Gordon Gordon in *The Rose Sleep*.” It was not exactly an ovation, what happened, but it was all that the Kelliest of Kellys could have wished. *The Rose Sleep* was a success, and every one in the theatre knew it. Not a triumph, it was one of those generalized, pleasantly spread affairs that warm every one in the audience a little bit and tax nobody. Intelligent people would have felt themselves lacking in humor if they had taken it seriously and judged it as art; professional theatre people would have thought themselves stupid not to value its stage-craft and its eye for success; and silly people would think it a

perfect play that seemed in earnest, kept them guessing, made them cry and then let them down gently.

Arthur and I went around by the stage door to congratulate Lena and escort her home. We had waited a while for the first visitors to be gone, but the dressing-room was still crowded and Lena's dresser, a colored woman, was gathering up the flowers that were everywhere, some still in their boxes, and making them into a pile to take away. Lena had taken off her make-up and the pink dress that she wore in the last act, and had put on a dressing-gown, a dark kimono that Judie had made for her. Judie herself was standing rather back out of the press now, helping the maid with the flowers. Lena threw her arms around my neck and kissed me, and then kissed Arthur. She looked wild and vague, out of her head with the excitement. Everybody was kissing everybody and shouting congratulations.

The young woman who had the part in the third act with one line—she was some sort of Vermont neighbor to the heroine—turned to us.

"I'm giving a party for the company," she said. "Won't you come? We haven't been introduced, of course. Darling, introduce us."

Lena smiled:

"Mr. Boardman, Mr. Lane, may I present them, Miss Summerfield?"

I shook hands with Miss Summerfield.

"The point of which is," she said, "can't you come on to my party? I'm giving the company a supper-party. And I've asked some people to come in. I'd love to have you."

I waited a moment for Arthur to speak but he said nothing. "I'd love it," I said.

"I'm sorry I have another engagement, thank you," Arthur said finally.

"Oh, I'm sorry. But darling, you're coming, aren't you?" Miss Summerfield turned to Eleanor. "Soon?"

"It sounds adorable," Lena said, smiling. She had grown pale either because her make-up was off or because Arthur was so white and his eyes so burning. She smiled when she spoke to any one, but I could see her keep looking at Arthur and quickly away again, as if troubled.

"That's divine," Miss Summerfield said, "it'll be divine to see you."

"Only I must send some telegrams first. To the family. They'll think I'm murdered. In Clearwater we're still in the stage where a telegram means a calamity."

"Oh, heavenly! I can remember when it meant either death or twins. I came from Omaha, you know."

"I'm sure we have the State flower right here," Judie said; "we've every known flower." Nobody told her that Omaha was a city, not the State.

Miss Summerfield turned back at Lena's door.

"Don't delay—you're a celebrity now, darling." She turned to Arthur and me: "Don't you think I'm a saint, Mr. Both of You, forgiving Eleanor. I'm the smallest wren of nine, that's Shakespeare, I had only one line, you know, and in the last act—just 'It's time to go.' Had a way to say it, very dramatic. But Mr. Larson, our director, said, 'No, not that way, I want that tone for Miss Dandridge.' I ask you!"

"Is it art?" Lena said, turning off the two violent lights above her dressing-table.

"Is it art?"

Lena held up a book. "Look, Hal, our darling old Mrs. Courtlandt sent me a book, to wish me a triumph; isn't she sweet?"

"Who's our darling Mrs. Courtlandt?" Miss Summerfield asked.

"A friend of mine and Hal's," Lena said.

"An old thoroughbred," I said, "and a born New Yorker."

"Like to see a born New Yorker," she said.

"And here's a fortune in green orchids," Judie said. "They're from Clara Lorraine." She pushed the box aside with her elbow, but Lena did not notice Judie's look of disgust.

"And how can you get so many flowers?" I said, "the very first time you play. You couldn't have a public till after to-night."

"Well, Lafe," Lena said, "what about your friends, you and Judie and—" she looked at Arthur, who stood to one side.

"No, I'm afraid I didn't do the graceful thing," he said, "forgetting flowers. I'm all remorse."

"You're nice to me, coming here now," Lena said, gently, poor child!

"And Kelly," I said. "But that doesn't account for this festival."

Lena said: "No, but then there are people who were in the try-out at the Orchard Theatre; and in the audience there. Lafe, think of their remembering me all this time."

"Think of their not."

"I haven't seen all the cards yet. Lafe, where could you have found camellias?"

"I found them," I said.

"I suppose we'll have to go now and let you dress," Judie said.

"I'm off anyhow," Miss Summerfield said, with that hard-working gaiety that seemed to me so tiresome—"Call of the cocktail. Breath of the wild."

Arthur and I waited outside the stage entrance, smoking our cigarettes. The walls of the alley rising about us looked sheer and haunting; I wondered why the designer for *The Rose Sleep* had not learned from them instead of giving us scenes that looked as if they took their theme from Woolworth's window of cloth flowers. But he was a designer in great demand, and Kelly knew his way about in the theatre business, I reflected, he knew the right kind of bad from the wrong kind of bad. I should not have dreamed of intruding my views on him.

Presently Judie joined us.

She put her arm through mine. "Hal, you are to take me. Lena says she'll come on later with Arthur."

"But Arthur's not going, Judie," I said. "You heard him."

"Perhaps he'll come later with Lena."

"Like hell I will!" Arthur said.

"Like hell you won't. Well, at any rate you can drop Lena there."

"Certainly."

"That's over," Judie said.

"Who's this Summerfield?" he asked. "Do you know, Judie?"

"In New York she's Miss Omaha, in Omaha Miss Broadway," she said. "No dust on her."

"I see."

"And that's over."

CHAPTER XIV.

JERRY SUMMERFIELD's was one of those parties, happening by the dozen in New York every night during the season, where there are one or more persons the public has heard of and many who have heard of each other. The party begins after the theatre and people go on arriving until one o'clock and later. The general air is hospitable and chaotic, cordial and otherwise. At this Summerfield party you came or you went. You were neither an intimate nor a stranger. If Lena should walk in, every one would know who she was, since she was the lead in a new play; but nobody would know whether she had just arrived in town or had lived there always or would be leaving to-morrow. Nobody would reproach her for not having been seen of late and nobody would dread seeing her soon again. At these parties people look New York-tired but friendly and easy; they have not much gaiety but are animated and before long even noisy. There are enough egoists present to make solid centres around which things can swirl. There is, too, a general willingness to be seen and to see any and everybody. The soul of the party is nourished on drinks.

The place was already full when Judith and I arrived, for it was long after twelve by the time we had come across town and half a dozen blocks up Park Avenue and up the fourteen stories to Miss Summerfield's apartment. We entered a magnificent establishment, for the most part in the style of the Regency, with marble, marbleizing, rose dorée bro-

cade and painted or gilded furniture. The hand of the decorator was plain, a certain monumental something, a studied richness amidst an assumption of austere spaces. Judie, who knew about everything and everybody, told me that it had lately been done for Miss Summerfield, while she was absent in Paris, by her divorced husband, who was a de luxe decorator with a shop on Madison Avenue. He had come from Ohio and his name was really James Sullivan, though he called himself De Voy, Henri De Voy. Judie said it was a good alimony system, good for both sides.

Miss Summerfield was a very rich young woman whose father owned mines or ranches in Omaha, Judie said. She had nothing to do, she liked the life of the theatre, and so chose to be an actress. Last season she had come on, very well dressed, in the second act and walked across the stage at the back, with a laugh a moment before her exit. In this rôle she had enjoyed a long run at seventy-five dollars a week, and had spent her salary and much more at the Biltmore beauty parlor. She had a bad figure but was tall and smart, with a lean, pretty face.

The three chairs in the entrance-hall were occupied, as we came in, by three negroes, a woman and two men. One of them was a fat man, the husband of the woman, whose name was Edna Jones. Judie had seen them before at parties. The other was a little man, almost white, who was to accompany her when she sang. They sat there in the gilt Regency chairs, and the woman wiped her arms now and then with a red rubber sponge, like a small brick, that she held in her right hand.

Up-stairs some people were dancing in a long

gallery with crystal sconces along the walls and curtains of shimmering ivory and flesh pink like a white cockatoo. Trays of cocktail glasses stood about here and there and three footmen were coming and going with trays of cocktails and whiskey and soda.

They brought the entertainers up-stairs and Edna Jones sang. She was a woman with a squat body, ugly and swaybacked, with no voice and poor songs. She had only her clownishness of manner to get on with and a certain impertinence, combined perhaps with the memory of former successes of more than one kind. She sang two jazzy tunes and then some blues—one about having a polar bear on her heart that was not bad. After she had sung, she sat on a divan beside a blond young man who held her hand. There were people who looked at Edna Jones with a certain excitement in their eyes. She suggested something exotic to them, a certain release and sexual abandonment. But this was all in their imaginations. She had none of the warmth or sensuous languor of her race; her voice had none of the beautiful metallic whine or rich melancholy or naïve brightness of the negro voice. Even Judie, who had a passion for primitive African sculpture and who saw things through prejudice and fad rather than through her eyes, found this entertainment tiresome enough and rose to follow the guests who were moving toward the dining-room for supper. Champagne was now being passed around.

"I'm the youngest wren of nine," I heard Miss Summerfield's voice saying from the crowd inside the dining-room entrance. She saw us and came to shake hands. Her eyes were staring out of her face from the cocktails and champagne she had had.

"Listen," she said. "I'm delighted you came. Just saying I'm the smallest wren of nine. I make a single and positively my last appearance every night."

"Another Bernhardt," I said.

"Yes, second Bernhardt. Must write Dad that. He saw her once in a tent, crazy about her. Sat in the front row. But his beard frightened her—he's got a long, red beard. She stopped her big smile when she saw him. Where's Eleanor?"

"I haven't seen her yet," I said.

She looked at the diamond watch on her wrist.

"It's long past two. She thought Dad was an Indian."

"Perhaps Lena's here," I said. I knew she was not.

Mary Hinton, an American singer, who had made a sensation in *La Tosca* that season by falling so hard that the opera-house shook, stopped as she heard Lena's name.

"But, Jerry, you promised I should see her, sweet. I'm dying to know her. How lovely she was tonight! Mark my word, she'll be the first actress in America. And I'm not drunk."

"She's due any minute," the hostess said.

"So is the dawn," Hinton said. "And I've got a concert Christmas Eve. I've got to go to bed."

She kissed Jerry Summerfield good-by.

"Well, seriously, what has happened to Eleanor, Judie?" Jerry asked.

"Let's hope nothing."

"Here's Robin Adair dying to meet her. Aren't you, Robin?"

"Is Robin Adair his honest-to-God name?" Judie asked.

"Yes," he said, solemnly. "What did you think of the play?"

"You can tell that with the pâté," Miss Summerfield said, and left him to supper with us. There was enough supper for a regiment of princes.

He was a critic, and one of those young men around the town who brought a great halo and promise from seething college sets of ten years ago but have simmered down to plumpness and heavy drinking, when there is anything to drink. His delight in the arts consisted in asking if you had read some new book or seen some new play. If you said yes, he asked what you thought of it, and to your remark he replied by saying that he thought it rather good or that he was rather disappointed in it. This amount of discussion seemed to appease him and serve as a transfer to another book or play. He made an agreeable member of a party sometimes by keeping things going when there was nothing to keep going. His conversation humanized a vacuum without reducing it.

We stood eating sandwiches, salad, caviare, and pâté de foie, which was in the shape of little ducks coated with yellow jelly; and Robin spoiled the decoration of fruit and flowers in the centre of the table by pulling out a banana from the bottom row. Two apples slipped and rolled away down the table.

"Now you've done it!" Judie said. "And the banana won't be ripe, not in a palace like this."

"Oh, I don't know, I think the rich live very well," he said.

"Really?"

"I mean in some ways they live well and in some ways not."

"Well, yes," Judie said.

"What do you think of Edna Jones?" he asked.

"I think she's an artist."

"A poisonous burlesque of a beautiful thing, I call it," Judie said. What with the cocktails and champagne, she was feeling combative by now.

Robin Adair's voice had gone up half an octave with cocktails, and he asked me about two books at once.

"Have you read Sherwood Anderson's *Dark Laughter* and Galsworthy's *Caravan*? I don't think Galsworthy's very interesting, do you?"

A fat, near-sighted girl came up. "Wasn't it marvellous? Dandridge is simply great." She shouted to Robin Adair. "I'll say she is!"

He seemed to have a modern feeling that she was pursuing him. He said yes, without smiling, and went on with his readings and disappointments.

"I think the trouble with Cummings is—" he began, after going through one or two recent movements in poetry—"I think the trouble is he doesn't know yet what he wants to do."

"What I like is that he's always known what he doesn't want to do," I said.

"Oh, no, Hal," Fan Townes cried to me, breaking into our meeting. "Rob's all set to discuss the Pantheon, aren't you, Robin? Or is it the Hall of Fame? But, Hal, you come on to the library and whisper to me."

"Shall I tell you something?" Fan said to me.

As we went up the steps to the library we saw Mary Hinton sitting on the stair half-way down, looking remote and truculent. She had not gone yet. Judie was sitting beside her.

"Hello," Fan said.

Mary looked up.

"Don't you dare say I'm drunk," she said.

"Oh, no!" we said.

"Is it time to go?" Judie asked.

"Yes," I said, "it's long past two. Fan's going to tell me something, just a minute."

"Yes, just a minute," Fan said.

Judie slid over and leaned her head back against the stair wall.

"I'll wait for you here, Hal," she said. "Evidently Lena's not coming."

The party would go on for hours yet. There were people who would go home and the rest would get louder and louder till there were ladies standing on their heads or doing handsprings in the single garment that they wore, and two or three people falling asleep in the armchairs.

Down at the end of the hall I saw a group of modernists from an experimental theatre. Their leading dramatist was drunk and was denouncing, with plenty of wit and noise, the press for the way anything new was treated. Several young men were standing by to listen, smiling affably; their faces looked tight-skinned and pale yellow, with thin lines to the sides of their mouths, glassy eyes, and a strange air of senility about them.

Clara Lorraine was with them, talking most of the time, either alone or along with anybody who happened to be speaking. She was dressed in a black dress cut very low, of velvet, and carried a green lace handkerchief which she flourished about with her white hands as she talked. She looked distinguished and brilliant, vicious and rare. When she saw me she left the crowd for a moment.

"Look, my precious one, where's the lovely thing? You'd know, aren't you twins or something?"

"Family friends," I said.

"Oh, is that it? I thought you were twins and everything."

"No, old friends."

"Where is she?"

"She promised to come on here," I said.

"Oh, she'll come. I'm dying to see her again. Isn't she exquisite!"

I smiled foolishly like a rustic; seeing Clara Lorraine thus was like tripping into a bank of drunken orchids.

"Henry Boardman, why don't you come to see me?"

"May I? I certainly will," I said.

"You've said that whenever I met you."

"I'll do it," I repeated.

"Well, do. You fool!"

She rejoined the dramatists.

When we were sitting in the little panelled room that had doubtless been bought from a dealer at a big price, and by him out of some English cottage for a song, Fan said: "Well, we've got here at last. Swell little room, should hardly call it panelled, boarded would be better. What's it? Pine?"

"Yes," I said. "Painted once. But scraped off, wouldn't be simple painted. Wouldn't be Early American. Scrape Charles the Second to make him Cotton Mather."

"But that wasn't what I wanted to tell you. I'm thinking of getting married. What would you think of my getting married?"

"Well, Fan, it's a large order," I said.

"Ain't it?" she said. "Wish I knew."

I looked at Fan. Poor Fan, with her wax skin, and

her awkward body never smelling quite fresh, her wide mouth and high cheek-bones. Her face would have been matter-of-fact if she had been a man; as a woman's it was wild and scatter-brained and friendly. Love, I thought, would never be her portion in life; children perhaps, but not love.

"May I ask who the fortunate man is?" I said.

"No, tell you next week. In case I change my mind by then. I'm not sure yet."

"I see. All right.

"If we do, it'll be soon, next month," she said.

"Well, congratulations. It might be wonderful for you."

"It might. Well, you run on now, Hal, I'll sit here a little, I seem to be washed out."

"All right."

"Good night, Hal. Let you know when I know myself."

"Good-by, Fan."

"Good night."

I went on back down the stair, thinking of Lena and Arthur. How lucky they were to be passionate! I thought. To know what they wanted of life, though it destroyed them.

CHAPTER XV

IT was four o'clock when we got to Barrow Street and the door of our house; Judie was yawning as she took a last look at the stars, which showed here as if it were the country or some old English town.

The apartment was dark.

"She's come in and gone to bed," Judie whispered. "How could she sleep after all that? If I had played like that, I know I'd be awake till Judgment Day."

She tiptoed into Eleanor's room and listened.

"Lena's not here," she said, trying to keep her voice quite matter-of-fact; and turned on the light. The room was just as she and Lena had left it when they went to the theatre. Two or three garments had been thrown on chairs. Judie punched the light off again and sat down by the window.

"A thousand stars," she said.

I looked out of the window. The houses on the other side of the street were low and behind them the back yards and little gardens were open. Below me one tree stood up leafless in their midst. The light of the town was dim here and mingled faintly with the sky; the stars shone brightly and in the east a white star larger than the rest. There were some little specks or crystals in the window-glass that caught the moonlight, and I could not tell which the stars were and which were they.

"That settles it," Judie said, dropping her head in her hands, her elbows on her knees.

"What?" I asked. I knew what she meant.

"You know, Hal. She's at Arthur's."

"I suppose so," I said; there seemed no use pretending.

"Has she been in love before?"

"No."

"Never? Please turn on the light."

I pushed on the top light overhead before I replied:

"Deep in her feelings. But free, I think. Never been in love with anybody, not really."

"She is with him."

"Oh, yes."

"She'd do anything for him."

"Lena's like that. When she gives she asks nothing. She wants to give everything," I said.

"And to-night she was all excited."

"Naturally. Shall I go now, do you think?"

"Now?"

"And not trouble her?"

"No, my God, stay!" Judie said. "Let's don't have her slipping in like that. Poor kid, she'll have enough slipping in to do after this."

"Yes. In this world, yes."

"She'll have enough stealing in and out."

I said, "Gordon Gordon was not at the party."

"No, had a party of his own."

"I know he did. That's what I was thinking. Maybe Lena and Arthur went to Gordon's party."

"Oh, Hal, you know she didn't. You know she hates him."

"Oh, yes, of course I know."

"The company all went to his damn party. So while they were all roaring around, and the rest of us too, she was about her own—" Judie stopped.

"I know. Her own intense affairs, bless her heart!"

"That's just the difference."

We sat smoking a long while and said nothing. At last Judie said:

"Thought I was good and lit. But I'm too blame sober."

"It's enough to sober the old soak himself," I said. "My head feels as clear as fate."

"Cut fate."

"All right."

"And don't be classical. Why should he want to make it to-night, Hal? Of all times!"

"I think I see that. There's jealousy, seeing Lena giving herself to those hundreds of people, seeing her accept their applause. There's pride. She was his, she would be more his, you see that?"

"I see that."

"And there's the fascination of seeing some one you know in one way suddenly become some one else. You see this other person, this creation, there on the stage. But you know the real person too. It enchants you."

"Like the spell of art," Judie said.

"It enchants you by flattering your egotism. Like art, yes, that too, it's real and unreal at the same time. But what excites you, I believe is the infatuation of your egotism."

"Worse on the stage? Stronger?"

"Yes," I said. "The person the crowd sees is not what she seems to them, she is what you, only you, know she is. And then, of course, we don't have to find reasons; he was mad over her, that's enough."

"Damn him!"

"The sky is lightening," I said. "It will soon be daybreak."

"Damn his soul!"

We heard a taxi in the street below, then the front door creak, and footsteps on the stairs. Lena unlocked the door and came in. I did not look at her.

"Lena!" Judie cried. "Here you are!"

She threw her arms about Eleanor.

"You didn't come to the party. Every one was asking."

"No. He didn't want to go."

"Every one was talking about your triumph. Why, where are your flowers? Such flowers, flowers!"

"I left them in Arthur's room," Lena said. "There was a pile of them."

"Let me have your cloak, Lena," I said, going to help her with it. "Now, there."

I put the cloak on a chair.

"Don't you want a bite to eat, darling? We've had supper."

"No. You're nice but I'm not hungry. I couldn't eat."

"Then I'll sit down. My legs are wrecks. Listen how still it is in this old house."

"And I must go," I said. "It's daybreak."

Lena caught my hand and held it tight.

"Don't go, Hal."

"All right," I said.

Holding on to my hand she dropped on her knees and buried her face in Judie's bosom, and began to sob.

Judie stroked her hair.

"Never mind, darling."

We stayed there an hour with her like that, more than an hour, till she was quiet and Judie thought she was asleep. I went down-stairs and walked over to Charles Street and on west to Abingdon Square.

At the corner of Bank Street a woman turned as she passed me and stood waiting for me to speak. She was young, with long dark eyes, and asked if I wanted to say anything to her. I thanked her and said no. I lifted my hat—to love and death, I suppose. She hesitated and came back nearer, bent toward me, and looked in my face: “Something the matter, Captain?” “No, just rotten luck,” I said, and turned away from her down Bank Street, leaving her there staring after me. Then I walked half an hour or so longer, and came home and went to bed. I tried to put myself to sleep with a text-book of essays sent me by a publisher, but could not read it. Then I took Sherwood Anderson’s *Dark Laughter* from the shelves by my bed and read a passage that I liked very much. It was the place where the little boy used to sit with his mother on the bench in front of the store and watch the river. She would always buy a trifle, a spool of thread or something, from the man who kept the store, so as not to seem to be imposing on him. Then she and the little boy sat down on the bench in front and watched the river.

CHAPTER XVI

I COULD not have slept more than an hour before I was awakened by a pounding on the door of my study, and then I heard Judie's voice calling.

Something's happened to Lena, I thought, and rushed out to the door. It was Judie standing there with her arms full of newspapers.

"Judie," I said, "what's the matter?"

"The matter is I've been out to get the notices, here, let me in, Old Horse, this hall's like a vault."

"Well, come on in," I said, "I'll get something on and make a fire."

I came back with my dressing-gown and slippers, but Judie had gone into the kitchen.

"Come on in here," she said. "Light the oven, it's warm enough. And start some coffee."

She had the papers spread out on the table.

"Is Lena awake?" I asked.

"No, look what they say! They're crazy about her."

"Just a second," I said.

"It's getting warm in here all right. Is the coffee made? No. It took me forever to get her to sleep, so I just stayed up till the news-stands opened. I left Lena asleep at last. Look, here are all of them, all the morning ones. I read some in the street."

"You take two lumps?" I said.

"Yes, and black this morning; no sleep. They're crazy about her. Oh, Golly!"

We sat at the kitchen table with our coffee and then Judie read me the parts about Lena in the re-

views; and I read others for myself at the same time. Lena had something of an ovation in a small way. The better critics were warm and friendly, the noisier ones raved in superlatives and said that Lena was a great actress; others seemed to like her just as well for not being. Every critic mentioned her beauty. All told how she was a newcomer. Then one reviewer said that there were twelve beautiful women on the New York stage and she was all of them.

Judie clapped her hands.

"Here we are!" she said. "I knew one of them would do it. He says she's a second Duse. One of them always says it if the performance goes off with a bang like that. Second Duse—don't you love it; and he wouldn't like the first if he saw her. Well, let him rave, we've got to keep the lights bright on the Great White Way."

"Now let's go back and see what the play gets," I said. "Gordon Gordon is generally admitted to be a sterling actor."

"Oh, I can tell you. See. They guy the play a little, all friendly, though. All say it's hokum—tried and trusty stuff."

"But that won't be anything against it," I said.

"It's sheer genius, being as silly as *The Rose Sleep* is. And never slipping out of it."

"And the author has the benefit of his past successes," I said. "After all, he's Eric Mallett."

Judie put the extra copies she had bought for me in a pile, and began to fold back the others at the theatre page. I knew they were for Lena but did not mention it. Instead I said: "It will make a great story for the magazines, the young Southern girl, the beauty, the sudden golden shower of success. That's

already started in one or two of the notices. It could sound well that way in Clearwater."

Judie suddenly dropped her head and rested her forehead in her hands.

"May hell take him!" she said fiercely. "If it weren't for him we'd be up there reading them to her."

"Yes," I said, "but we'd better let her sleep."

"To have that come just when this happens for her, the same night, it's rotten! Just think how pleased she'd be, and how we'd be sitting down there on the foot of her bed reading these and chuckling. But now it's a mess, just a mess. My God, can't anything ever come off straight and clear, without being all spoiled? I suppose you'll insist love's a grand thing——"

"I don't insist on anything about love," I said.

"Well, it may be a grand thing but I wish it could have come a little later. I mean a success like this is enough for one shot. I'd think it was about enough. And I wish the man could have been something else, not your Ritzy Southern gentleman pig that'll never give her any peace. When I think how we could all be celebrating!"

"I'll send a telegram home for her, Judie," I said.

"And I'll have these for her when she does wake up. After all, she can't be quite indifferent even now. After all, if nothing else, she can give this to him too. It's all the more for her to give."

I was in my room almost two hours after Judie had left, but heard no sounds of any one stirring in Lena's apartment down-stairs. Then I had to go to my office at Columbia.

As soon as my class was over early that afternoon

I hurried straight home again from Columbia and stayed indoors with the hope that Lena might come in. But I did not see her. Somewhere toward seven Judie knocked at my door. She was bringing me the evening papers, but I had already bought them.

"They say the same thing," she said.

"Yes, just as good as those this morning."

"I went in her room at noon, waited till the twelve o'clock whistle blew, then I went in. She was already awake, lying there."

"You showed her the notices?"

"And she was awfully darling about them, so pleased."

"Their professional importance I don't think she quite takes in, I mean how much they may count for her," I said.

"And that's funny. You'd think as much as she's been with actors, even these few rehearsal weeks——"

"But, Judie," I said. "She's not with them. She's in that world of hers. She hasn't yet taken in what's going on. That's the way she is."

"Well, she was awfully pleased and read them all, and liked my being so lit up over them, and then she lay back against the pillows. Yes, she was darling about them but it was I cut them out."

I said nothing.

"Now she's gone to the theatre," Judie said.

Next day toward evening I heard Lena's door underneath my study shut and then her step coming up-stairs. My legs were shaking under me but I made a great noise when she opened the door and came in.

"Well, the great actress! Now are we satisfied?"

Lena took my hand in both of hers and held it against her cheek.

"Lafe, you're sweet."

"I've all the reviews here, as you see," I managed to say, as if she were thinking only of reviews.

"I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have you here."

"Oh, no, Lena—" I began.

"Yes."

"Don't make me cry."

"You're so sweet, Lafe."

"I sent Miss Bessie another telegram this noon. There are lots of flattering notices every season, but these you got are unusual, Lena."

"That's what Kelly says. He's raving around, he's so pleased."

"Of course he is. How was the second performance? Sorry I couldn't come, but I had a conference last night, worse luck! Was Arthur there?"

She blushed a deep red.

"Yes, he was there. He thought the audience was just as enthusiastic as the first night."

I hurried on. "Fine," I said. "Watch me put all these together and send them to Miss Bessie." I began gathering up the papers and cutting out the notices with as much stir and bustle as possible till she was gone.

CHAPTER XVII

MOST of my dull Christmas and dull New Year's I spent writing on two things I had begun. Lena was mostly at the theatre or with Arthur, Judie was flying around to Webster Hall and holiday parties in people's studios. It was not too jolly. Two or three days after New Year's my telephone was out of order. I could get no answer over it and the crackling in my ear sounded dead. I went down to Judith's room on the second floor to notify the repair department.

It was somewhere around ten o'clock and Judith was sitting up in her couch-bed against a pile of pillows and cushions that were stacked against the corner wall. She had a faded kimono over her shoulders. By the fire sat a young woman whose name I had never heard but whom I had seen going in and out of her room at the end of the hall. She had on her nightgown still and no stockings, only a pair of satin evening slippers, black, and an evening coat with a fur collar around her. Cleveland Towns, with a raincoat over his pajamas, and some Chinese mules, worn almost to shreds, on his feet, stood leaning against the mantelpiece smoking a cigarette. That world, at least, was hardly up yet; every one was having coffee and smoking.

"Have some coffee, you sweet old thing," Judie said.

I finished my telephone call and sat down at the foot of her bed with the cup that Cleveland brought me.

"Towns, you eat some buttered toast; there's some in the oven. Don't think the mice can get it there," Judie said.

"See many mice?" I asked.

"No—for an old house like this. We don't see many, do we, Cleveland? Not many."

"No. But we see one often," he said.

"Lena's not up yet," Judie said.

I said I'd not expect her to be.

"Never is at this hour."

"I suppose she has to quiet down after the theatre," I said.

"Not that. It's Arthur keeps her up. He's writing reams, and she, I suppose, has all she can do to read it. At any rate, he calls for her at the theatre and they walk in Central Park and along the docks and God knows where, and he sits here talking with her in her room, and they meet in the afternoon sometimes; not so very often, though. It takes a great deal of love, I think. I mean to be together like that so much."

"It's good he's writing," I said; "isn't it? Poem after poem."

"If you like."

"And no psychology, thank God!" Cleveland said. He began to parody somebody's poetry that had annoyed him.

"I first knew Henderson, his right name was Manuel, Manuel Legee, when he had the house you can see From the door here, standing by me, I mean, His knack was mythical——"

"Oh, Cleveland, do dry up," Judie said. "Just the same, how she stands him, I don't know. He's mar-

vellous enough looking, oh, I grant you. I'm not so sour as not to know Arthur's marvellous-looking. You know who I think he looks like?"

"Who?"

"Salvator Rosa. By the way, you old sweet thing, there's an idea for you, you are planning to write novels, say your hero looks like Salvator Rosa, it sounds artistocratic, like brocade, and nobody knows how he looks really——"

"I know how Salvator Rosa looked," I said. "I've seen portraits of him, and if I hadn't I've seen him on the notes of the Bank of Naples."

Judie jumped up in bed and clapped her hands: "He is? Well, bless their hearts. I'm crazy about the Italians. You told me how all during the war they went right on with the excavations at Pompeii, aren't they darlings, digging up their lewd little images! Oh, Hal, I want you to be the father of my second child. Of course Ralph must be the father of the first."

"Oh, Judie, old stuff," Cleveland said, "those invitations to be a father, no kick to it now."

"It was just Latin logic," I said. "There was a fund for it."

The girl by the fire turned round but still said nothing.

Cleveland asked, "Fund for what?"

Judie shrieked with laughter, "Pompeii, not fathering—we're still on Pompeii. What I say is I don't see how Lena stands Arthur. Now look, she gets a box of flowers from a man she never heard of, they merely are delivered at the theatre; Arthur's raging."

I said: "He'll have to get used to that."

"Jealousy. And you couldn't blame him if you'd seen her last night in that white dress she had them send on from home. It's long. What a sweet body she has! Well, he's jealous, all right."

"It's very flattering while we are still in love."

"But afterward?"

"Uxorious," Cleveland said.

"No doubt," I said. "But this isn't afterward, Judie."

"And then he won't admit he's jealous; oh, no, not Arthur, he's got to twist himself into manly reasons."

"That's only pride," I said. "Arthur's all pride. And you have to be a Southerner to understand it quite. It's sort of a sense of form, an art of egotism, conceit even; a sort of way of having life on no terms that make you absurd or that you consider unbecoming."

Judie said: "Something in that."

"I'm sure it must be trying to other people, this Southern pride. Lord, how often have I heard my little cousins when I was a boy say: 'of course we don't do that,' meaning our family! No moral reasons, just that we didn't do that sort of thing. And what could be better for the ordinary simple human being?"

"Yes, yes."

"It's like a horse not drinking dirty water. He just doesn't."

"But he can dirty up a lot of water," Judie said.

The repair department rang to tell me that my telephone was now on, with apologies; it was Judie's that they meant to cut off, she has not paid her bill.

"So we'll come up to you to phone our lovers now," Judie said.

"I'd better let you have my extra key, Judie."

"Yes, you'd better. I won't have a cent to spare for a week. And Cleveland's broke. He's staying in my hall room because he's kicked out of his apartment, aren't you, Towns? And he'll be some while."

"I suppose so," Cleveland said.

"By the way, where is your apartment, dear?"

"Never was any. Was rooming with a chap."

"And he kicked you out?"

"Oh, that was after that rum from Vera Cruz."

There was a rap at the knocker and the girl by the fire rose languidly, opened the Yale latch, and without looking to see who it was went back to her chair. Vera Van Dorne, a young woman who amused herself by designing dancing-costumes, came in to bring Judie an order from one of her clients, for three designs on three shades of blue silk.

The telephone rang.

"That's our swan song, Cleveland, till the bill is paid. But see who it is."

The call was from Beulah Eisner, she and her mother, Beulah Reynolds, the poetess, were coming over if Judie was at home.

"Tell them to come on," Judie said.

I could see that Judie was going to hold one of her gatherings and thought I had better go.

"I must run," I said.

"No, no," Judie said. "Your review's not even out yet."

"No, I must run."

On the stair I met Beulah and her mother. Beulah took my arm.

"I'll walk along to your door with you, Hal. Want to ask you something." She turned to her mother.

"You run along, dear, I'm coming. Look, Hal, what do you think? I'm beginning a new novel."

"So?" I said weakly.

Yes, Beulah planned a novel and was going to make Lena the heroine, and wanted to get my analysis of her. In the dim light of the hall I could see her sharp little face and that superanalytical look in the eye, and the silver earrings reaching almost to her shoulders. I knew that gaze.

"What's your analysis of her?" Beulah asked.

Poor Lena! I decided to be simple——

"Why, I don't know," I said. "She's a sweet thing."

"Oh?" Beulah answered.

"Lena's a darling."

"She's an orchid, I call her," Beulah said.

"And what'll your novel be?"

"It will happen between one noon and noon of the next day. I want to express every shade of the woman's soul."

I thought to myself: "You want to do a lot of rot, a lot of made-up rot." But I said nothing.

"I must talk it over with you and get your reactions. I've got four questions to ask you. First, has Eleanor feeling? I'd like to know that. Feeling is the foundation of all living."

"So it is," I said, "and I'm always forgetting it."

"Has Eleanor feeling?"

"Oh, she must have," I said, more than lightly, but that did not get through Beulah's skin.

"That's good. Well, then, is she intellectual? That point concerns me."

"How should I know? You know how I slap at things. We're all butterflies down South. I know I can hardly wrinkle my forehead."

Beulah Eisner looked gravely at me. "I'm not so sure. At any rate, I know when I was at Bryn Mawr there was a Southern girl. We all thought she was just a butterfly, but she took first honors above the whole class."

"But that doesn't prove she had any brains," I said. "Not unless you could hear them creak when she used them."

"Oh, really, be serious. Is Eleanor intellectual?"

"What's our measure," I asked.

"Has she ideas?"

"Oh, she must have."

"And is she of the theatre, born for the theatre?"

"I should think she was born herself. In case herself is the theatre—well there you have it."

"Will she be a great actress? I'm studying my heroine on that point."

"Are you? It's quite a point," I said.

She looked at me thoughtfully.

"I think so," she said, gravely stressing the *I*.

"I reckon we'll know that when we see how Lena gets on," I said. "If she succeeds, then they'll say she's a great actress. *Siempre es simpatico el que vince*, as they say in Spanish."

"I don't know Spanish."

"He who wins is always likeable."

"Oh."

"But of course," I said, "Lena'll have to do the best she can. As they say in Italian, no sheep has five legs."

Beulah Eisner looked severely at me.

"You don't think much of American literature, do you?"

"Why not?" I said.

"I feel that you don't."

"Well, I like it when I like it," I said, and added, to be annoying—"as Molière said, I take my own where I find it." I tried to think of a German quotation but couldn't.

"I believe in American art for America," Beulah Eisner said firmly.

The quiet of my room, when I got there and had closed the door, stole gratefully over me.

In the street below a bell was jingling from some pushcart going by. It clattered sweetly, and I found myself listening to it as if I were at home again in the South and the cattle were trotting by. Farther off it dropped to a mere twinkle, then less and less, like a pasture-bell.

Music struck up. I went to the window and looked out; this street at least would have some straightness and health. Three men were playing, two had accordions, one a kind of cornet or short trumpet. One of the men had a great yellow accordion, the other a smaller black one; the three figures were stocky and stalwart, with their shoulders far back, so that their coats hung off them. The music they played meant to be jazz, but they could not keep out of it something from their Calabrian hills.

But Beulah had started a train of thought in my mind, and as I sat there I wondered what, if I had to, I would say really about Lena and how I would answer those questions.

I seemed to know her very little. But I realized too that she was not yet come into a certain actuality. She had yet what young people often have, a vagueness of outline that is due to their being still so mingled with life itself, with dreams and passions and feeling. They have not yet been shaped in terms

of the world we live in, but are seen as mysterious and undefined, like nature.

I was not so very old myself, for that matter.

But I knew what Beulah Eisner would have liked to do with Lena. She wanted to surprise her passions, as if to take them naked. I knew the elaborate rot Beulah had wanted me to say, a kind of Browning obstetrics.

CHAPTER XVIII

I WAS sorry from the day Lena took up her theatre that she had met Arthur. I knew that he would be jealous of her acting and of the distance that the theatre might bring at times between her and himself; he would be sure to make her pay heavily. He would be proud, he would be sullen, sometimes deeply hurt. He would be made more passionate sometimes by her remoteness; the fact that she was no longer herself but a stage-being would excite him. He would be annoyed that the theatre could make her independent of him, and disgusted by the vulgarity, however good-hearted it might often be, of the stage-world.

All that seemed an extra burden. It was enough that Lena should have to pay for being an artist, to pay the cost of creation. I knew her and knew that nobody would pay more than she.

And I knew another way in which Lena in particular would pay. It was plain that she would never be a child of the theatre, never a gypsy as they are meant in Pinero's gentle piece about Trelawney of the Wells. Eleanor would never belong like that to the stage-world.

To be that means that you live in the theatre, you cannot keep away from it. When you are playing, and at the theatre every night, the rest of your day is empty or is spent gossiping about actors, managers, plays, scandals; only the evening counts, when you see the footlights and have grease paint on your face, and those two or three hours afterward per-

haps, when the excitement is still on you, the eyes of the audience still looking into your breast where the heart beats faster for them. You are happy and at ease only in the warm flow that is between the people of the theatre, and when you can live in the midst of all those shocks and explosions, those tragedies and keen, too soon forgotten crises, those high-colored relationships and ruthless conflicts that stage life affords. Your notions of success and failure in life, of romance, of your own age, of everything, turn on stage experiences and stage history; and Hecuba is all in all to you because you know yourself in Hecuba, because in sum you are a player born.

Lena would never be any of this, that was plain, and yet she would be a success, that was plain also. She would pay for that. There would be plenty of times when she would be made to pay the price of being in the theatre without ever being really of it.

I had been going over all this, trying to think it out, and I said it over to Arthur when he asked my opinion of Lena's chances on the stage. It was the first Wednesday in January, and we were to call in and see Lena after her *matinée*. We were walking down from Columbus Circle to the theatre. The air was chill and the light sordid and monotonous, and we meant to stop for a hot rum punch at a speakeasy on 53d Street, a restaurant in the basement of a most respectable, brownstone house. You rang and said to the Frenchwoman who came to look through the iron grill: "Mr. Tony Wade."

Arthur was railing at New York. It was largely jealousy of Lena's life there, but he took his shots at New York.

"Look," he said, "look at that paper! Do you suppose there's any city in the world as dirty?"

"Maybe not," I said.

"New York; riffraff throwing papers!"

"But look," I said. "I was just thinking what a nice old place New York is after all. Did you see that woman we just passed?"

"No, what?"

"Well she was hurrying along like everything. Considers she has an engagement, very pressing. Foolish-looking, about fifty, with white hair, plumpish. But I was thinking how nice it was she should have somewhere to hurry to, leading the life, having a party, an appointment, silly old dear."

"With overshoes and invisible stockings under those gossamer silk ones, to keep her old legs warm."

"But a choker necklace and a lipstick," I said. "And she's lucky to be rattling along here instead of souring by the window."

"In some town?" he said.

"Yes."

"It's no more damned boring at any rate."

We sat down at the speakeasy with our drinks.

"Do you think, Hal," Arthur said, "that Eleanor has the appeal on the stage that we know in her?" His voice was moody, he knew he had a point and was watching me to see how I took it.

"Well," I said, "let's go back a little. It's plain that Lena's not absorbed with the theatre only, and wholly innocent of every idea that's not theatre. And she's not consumed with the desire to show herself. And she's not a born mimic."

"No, not at all," he said.

"But her assets are enormous, the way she catches any suggestion at once, and sheds tears, laughs, anything at will. And then her movement, and her beauty and her low, bright voice. But of course these

are only surface, like a piano's tune or a trapeze-performer's suppleness."

"All that's remarkable, I know," Arthur said.

"I've seen *The Rose Sleep* three times; can't get over Lena's performance."

"As they say, she can do anything, Hal, with emotions, tones, movements. But that's only the instrument."

"Only the instrument, yes," I said. "It takes time to be an artist, to clear away around your own soul, and get a straight passage between it and your technique."

"Don't I know!"

"How slowly, my God, you free yourself and live in your own body!"

"Something I'll never do," he said gloomily.

"Why not?"

"Because I can't talk intimately, you know that."

"But your poetry is like you, old chap."

"If you like. But only in its sum."

"On a sort of large plane?" I said.

"I can't come close. I become false."

It was curious that he should know that he was false in small things. He was, and I had known him a long time now, three years. In the little affairs of life—they would be little to him at least—I could imagine Arthur a liar, a cad, a petulant child. He was out of scale for them. In some larger moment where boldness or command or physical danger was demanded, I could imagine him throwing away his life, sweeping prudence aside, wrecking his fortunes for a magnificent gesture, a grand disdain, a blind passion for splendor and glory, not only for the eyes of others to see but for his own need.

He went on: "You think Eleanor will be a great actress?"

"*Great* is not one of my words," I said. "Do you mean great like Rachel or Duse, or great like Mary Pickford?"

"I mean great artist."

I said: "Don't you want her to be, old top?"

"Don't be a damn fool," he said.

CHAPTER XIX

THIS pride and these high ways of Arthur's that bored Judie so much were different for Lena. She understood how Arthur came by them, and she took them along with him to her bosom. When he mocked or made fantastic statements about the emptiness of life or the cowardice and stupidity of the world, she knew, as I did, that at the bottom of what he said there was real suffering and emotion, and that very often, at his worst extremes, he was only trying to hide an emotion under its exaggeration.

She felt a sharp grief herself when she saw how people threw him off his key. Arthur could talk to her about some plan he had for a poem or book, or about a failure he had made when he tried to write something or other; he could speak quite simply and directly. But if some one else came into the room or if he was in company with a crowd of people, he would talk harshly, as if his writing were merely thrown off, and for relaxation; and he would slash and laugh at the world where you could sell rotten writing without trouble; all of it was a trick, he vowed, and why should we rack our wits?

At bottom what Arthur wanted was applause from others, some deference at least that would make them grant him a certain distance. What he wanted first was this applause from people, what he wanted most was his own approval of himself. That was the devil of it. When he was alone he lashed himself into poetic creation, into purification, impetuous melancholy. With people, he withdrew into his vanity and exaggeration.

When Arthur was a little boy of eight, his mother died, leaving him to the care of his kin. He went to live with some cousins of his father's, three old-maid sisters, Arthur used to say, who dyed their hair out of the same pot. Then after four years his father married again. Not every one meant to be unkind. His cousins and uncles and aunts, whose brains were offended by his intelligence and whose ideas of children pointed toward more colorless little boys, used to say that he needed a whipping, that he was a bad child and should be controlled. His stepmother, though she progressed from what was friendly indifference to a sort of jealous hatred because of his father, used to tell him that he was not so smart as he thought he was. If people paid him compliments they were only laughing at him. "They flatter you just to make a fool of you. You've got everybody in town laughing at you," she said.

Arthur more or less understood all this, but his nature had been poisoned. His brain could tell off explanations to himself, but the poison was there still. He already had had some success with his writing and people said kind things, even enthusiastic things, about it. But down in his heart Arthur either took them as fools or as people who meant to be kind or to be politic. Ten per cent of the praise he might take as fact, some of his writing was no doubt good. But that was scarcely enough to swell any man's head. Sometimes he was able to think of some one poem of his as good, able to stand on its own feet. What happened then was that he saw it as a work that was separated from himself, a sign of his capacity but a reproach for his not amounting to more. If he had had a success, struck fame all of a sudden, he

would have taken it to mean merely that he had dropped to the popular level.

These depths of him appeared in unexpected depressions where the praise or attention he got might have been thought cheering to any one: they appeared in ferocity of temper sometimes, and sometimes in magnificent abasement before the gifts of another. He would credit some artist who was in his mind at the moment, with infinite suffering and sacrifice for the sake of art, and would despise himself for keeping on the side of life that was well buttered. Then he said that all artists in general were riffraff, and that he himself was no better except for a few gleams of quality that he had inherited from aristocratic ancestors.

Lena in her own way knew all that, but took it as a part of his pain. It was a pain that he must endure. At the centre of his nature he was greedy, destroying, superb, and reckless. Her eyes grew quiet with the knowledge of life that she got by loving him.

Judie had noticed it. "She just folds her wings around him, doesn't she? I know. She thinks he never does himself justice."

"Bless her heart!" I said.

"And yet I'm positive she's just as capable of wrecking herself as he is."

"Lena's much more capable of wrecking herself than Arthur is. But she's more capable of saving herself, that's the difference."

"It's a damn shame, too, that she'll pay it all," Judie said.

"Well, there you are. Dante knew that when he said the more perfect a thing is the more it feels good and in the same way sorrow also."

"Well, whatever it is that makes her seem so still, makes her move so beautifully," Judie said.

"In her acting?"

"In her acting, too. All one lovely unity. When she turns toward another person there on the stage or lays her hand on his arm, she breaks your heart."

"Oh, Judie. . . ." I said.

"Well, speaking of love, I haven't heard a line from Ralph in two weeks."

"He's off in the country. That English country will do him good," I said. "He's off on a little vacation, I reckon."

"Well, I wish I'd hear from Ralph."

"Letter's probably on the way now," I said.

"Wish I'd hear from him."

It was not long after we were talking of her that Lena came in and began to tell us about her visit at Mrs. Courtlandt's. During these spring months she saw what was frequently for New York this friend who lived on lower Fifth Avenue, a few doors from Washington Square. She had first met Mrs. Courtlandt at a dinner given by my superior professor at Columbia, where Lena had gone with me and where she had seen this tall lady, dressed in black lace, with a spray of emeralds across her bosom, come into the room like the ghost of thirty years before.

Very pale, with a face like the Bourbons, long, with dark eyes, a high nose, and deep brow, on which she wore her hair in a chignon like Queen Alexandra's, her gown wholly out of the fashion and very distinguished, Mrs. Courtlandt seemed to Lena to create a restful distance from Times Square and the theatre. Her husband had died many years before

and soon after him her only son, in Central America, where he had gone with an archæological expedition; and in her lonely life she had written a book on Chinese painting and another on our Colonial history, for which two universities had conferred honorary degrees upon her. She had known every one to be known for two decades, Presidents of the United States, Chief Justices, and the writers and artists who flourished in the heyday of *The Century Magazine* and the epoch of Henry James and William Dean Howells. Edwin Booth had been a friend of hers, Clara Morris, Richard Mansfield, and the great Joseph Jefferson. To this she added all the New York of the past, families that were blood kin to her and that were related by marriage. She herself was confined to the house most of the time but they came in and out constantly to see her. Lena used to sit an hour sometimes for tea with Mrs. Courtlandt before dinner and the time to go to the theatre. It was pleasant to know a house in New York where you could see a friend without having to make an engagement a week ahead and then trust fate to keep it what you felt like doing at the time you made it.

This friend had a curious mixture of bluntness, courage, and deep feeling without sentiment, that daunted Lena at first a little, it was so different from the gracious strength or frailty of the old ladies she had known at home. But the loyal security of such a nature settled gradually into their friendship.

"I've written my father so much about you," Lena said, "he thinks you are the best friend I have in New York."

"I don't know about that," Mrs. Courtlandt said. "But I know what I have in my heart."

Lena used to tell me about these conversations. They did not talk of the past, Mrs. Courtlandt had none of that historical garrulity that can make age so tedious a thing in the world; nor did they revel in the present, as some too sprightly old people insist on doing. The air of that drawing-room seemed to say that history was long and human nature constant—it was comical to read in the stocking advertisements a notice of *nude* hosiery where we used to have flesh or blue; comical not because of the times, but because nudity had become a color; and it was delicious to remember Henry James when they drove him up to see Broadway in its theatrical district of lights and blazing signs. "Why," he said, "it's the effort of a mining town." Once Mrs. Courtlandt told of a Kentucky poet who came to New York, thirty years ago it was, to visit the editors and to lead the literary life for a fortnight. He had a cloak, a sort of cape, and a wide black hat, great eyes, and an aquiline nose, and told ladies good night at their door-steps, standing with one foot on the step, his cloak thrown back over his shoulder, his hat in his hand, looking most romantic and melancholy.

That was the poet old style, Lena thought, and was reminded a moment of Arthur. But it was no worse than the poet new style, with the childish spatter of sex and the boldness about nothing. Nor was romantic melancholy any emptier than psychological sincerity. The proof of the pudding was in the eating.

CHAPTER XX

I SAW Judie only two or three times and for half a minute, during the next few weeks. We were both carried along in the arms of our New York affairs. And then early one morning I was awakened by a pigeon alighting on the window-frame and beating his wings on the glass. Then I fell asleep again. A little after eight Judie knocked at my door. She wanted to talk to me, to tell me something, she said. As soon as I was dressed I went down to her room.

Her face was very white and her eyes too bright.

"Judie," I said, "what's the matter?"

"I'm just God awful, that's all."

Judie had a way of suffering theatrically that was a delicious pain in a fashion; it hurt but it let off her steam. This was not like that.

"Judie," what have you been doing?" I said, again.

"Batik," she said. "I took a first prize at the hand-craft exhibition last week. Congratulations."

"Yes. Congratulations."

"Come on for a while and talk to me. Have a Vermouth. But getting soused won't help. I've got to talk to you."

A gas-grate was burning and the air was not very good, it smelled of that beeswax and gasoline. Over by the window her batik frame was stretched, it rested on four chair backs. She had outlined the design already in her beeswax and paraffin mixture and was started on the painting. The ground color of the silk was a hot sulky red.

I sat down near the window and lit a cigarette.

"I need to talk to you, Hal, I'm all messed up. But you always help me. Sometimes when I think I'm not worth anything at all I say to myself: 'Well, Hal thinks I'm something.'"

"I wish I thought I were something myself," I said.

"Something himself. Bless you, you sweet old Hal! I've got tears in my eyes." Judie knelt down by me and put her arms around my neck.

"There, that's all right," I said.

"But honestly, Hal, you know you do get a sort of straight line from yourself to things. You know you do. And I always feel somehow that you are poised, you seem so."

"Know why?" I said.

"No, you old goose."

"It's because I'm always with artists——"

"But you're an artist——"

"Not really, I suppose."

"Go on. I said you seemed poised and you said it's because——"

"Because I'm always with artists and they monopolize the emotion and soul's upheaval. Can't you see the artists thinking: 'Oh, yes, these other people feel something, of course, but it's different. They don't feel so terribly.'"

"I can just see 'em thinking it," Judie said.

"So they come bringing all their woes to me, their rosy, shaken, black-and-blue souls. Till I feel like *Cædipus* in the French translation, *pourquoi vers ce palais vos cris ont-ils monté.*"

"Why to this palace your cries have they mounted?" Judie translated, and laughed.

"Besides," I said, "I'm usually host. I don't go

to see them, they come to my place. I've got to be the haven of calm."

"I see. Well, this is my place and we'll upheave together if you want to!"

"What is it, honey?" I said.

Judie took up her brush.

"It's Ralph," she said. "I'd like to bash his head in."

"Why?"

"Well, I say to myself, if Ralph wants to go off with another woman I say let him. Go on, I say, I don't give a damn!"

"Rot, Judie!"

"And why rot?"

"Simply because a part of loving anybody is to protect him. And people don't know what they want. It may be only a passing whim, and then where are we? Might as well say you'd let a child eat anything he happens to want at the moment."

Judie turned suddenly to me: "Hal, it's been two months since I heard from Ralph. I was half crazy. My God, I thought I'd die, just die. I wrote five times but didn't get a word back. I cabled. No answer, and then I cabled again and didn't hear anything. So I sent two cables. To the last I got an answer saying try Atlanta, with his company's address there. So I wired Atlanta. Then I got an answer: 'A thousand miles lie between us.'"

She went over to the mantelpiece and put her head on her arms and began to sob.

"Don't cry, old chap," I said, going to stand beside her. "Here, where's the Vermouth?"

"Oh, no, Hal, I don't want it," she sobbed.

"Don't cry, old chap," I said.

"What am I going to do?"

"You'll do all right."

"All right, oh God!"

"Don't cry. Don't cry, old chap!"

"What am I going to do?" She turned to me.

"You'll be all right. Just a little time, just a little blessed time."

"Ralph! I mean—to have him go and do like that!"

"Damn Ralph!" I said. "Go on painting and I'll tell you what I think."

She went back and began to paint a deep blue into the border of the design. "What?" she asked. "But don't talk loud. Lena's still asleep. She didn't get in till after three this morning."

"All right." I said, dropping my voice.

"He'll kill her, your fine Arthur. Well, tell me what you think."

"I always thought Ralph was a good deal of a fool. Sweet, lovable, yes, a lovable enthusiasm. Had a kind of excitability that looked like courage. But it was only excitability, childish vim, and a sort of not seeing the point of what he was smashing around with."

"Maybe it wasn't the point. He used to see something."

"Saw his own feelings," I said.

"Well, then, that," she agreed, nodding her head slowly.

"Judie," I said, "I always meant to ask you. Did you and Ralph live together before you were married?"

"Yes, of course, didn't you know that?"

"I reckon so."

"Of course."

"Well, think what breaking that convention meant to him, with his father the pastor of a little New England church."

"I know," Judie said.

"I knew Ralph was a little goose but I never knew he was an ass. The man that could send that telegram can't really mean much to you, Judie. Like a baby, perhaps. I mean you can take him to your bosom but not to your head, Judie."

"Imagine getting that telegram after we'd loved each other, and agreed that I'd stay here and work and he could go to London for his research!"

"What's Ralph doing in Atlanta?" I asked.

"Same work. His firm shifted him there. Patents, something in a patent office. Ralph's very sharp. Jamie Lane was by here two or three days after the telegram—a friend of Ralph's. Ralph sent him by to tell me, patent office, or some writing. He's talking about founding some sort of colony in the West, sort of Utopia, some love colony. With Ralph as the Redeemer."

"Good Lord, what idiots!"

"He's living with a woman we used to know. Vivian Knox, lunatic; she's been locked up once."

"Insane really?" I asked.

"Well, in a home, a cure. Well, Ralph thinks he has found the ideal woman—she takes hot, emotional baths, and they talk socialism and colonies. They're expecting a baby."

"But anybody who can send a telegram like that to some one that's suffering!" I said. "Being effective when somebody else is being ripped up. If the telegram had even been imaginative! But it's only

cheap. Cheap figure of speech. That's enough to cure you. Concentrate on despising it all."

"Easy to say."

"I know, but try, you poor dear. Think that if you come out of this, you can come out of anything. One survival guarantees we can survive again. We just naturally have to patch out life like that."

Judie smiled.

"Just naturally—you old Southerner. Kiss me."

She kissed me and turned to her painting.

"But yesterday," she said presently, putting down her work again, "Ralph was here."

"Ralph was here!" I said. Judie was astonishing.

"Came here to see me. Had to come to New York for his firm, some new patent, a machine that takes your picture for ten cents. Finishes and delivers it right off. Ralph really mentioned it three times, he was so excited about it. It will be placed——"

Judie was getting excited about the invention and off the point herself.

"How did he act?" I asked.

"He cried. Said he didn't know why he had done it. Begged me to forgive him. Forgive what? The telegram, he oughtn't to have sent the telegram. Still I could forgive that. But if he didn't love me, if he loved some one else, that was nothing to forgive, I said, he couldn't help that. You just can't help that sort of thing. He cried. I could have had him back by just crooking this finger. It's me he loves. But I wouldn't."

"Not by a damn sight!" I said. "No, Judie."

"No, Hal."

I poured out some of the Vermouth, for her and for me. Judie would not take any.

"No, no liquor. Then he asked me to come and live with them, the three of us, there's going to be a baby soon too, he said. We'd all three live together. Wanted me at least to come down and see them and know Vivian. But I remember her. 'Ralph,' I said, 'I've met Vivian.'"

"Seeing Ralph's such a fool ought to cure you, Judie," I said, "if you can only stand it meantime. And it isn't as if he had some tremendous physical hold on you. Physically you can live without him."

"Oh, yes."

She took up the brush and a cup and began to paint but sat down on the couch instead.

"And, Hal, I had a letter from his mother Wednesday. Ralph had written her about getting a divorce. She wrote me she thinks I ought to get the divorce. She thought I ought to pay for it. Ralph hasn't a cent, as we all know, she said. I wrote back that I was saving my money to study abroad next winter. Ralph and I had our money together when he left. I'd saved five hundred from my batik and the prizes. But he's spent it all, all we both had. I told his mother he had all my money and I told her I was going to study abroad. She wrote back that she didn't see how I could think of spending money on travel when there was a poor little baby coming into the world to be disgraced."

I only caught my breath, I was too surprised to speak.

"And I'd always liked mother—suppose it was because Ralph took after her, and she seemed never to have lived."

"Just the same," I said, "don't you pay for the divorce."

"No, I won't," she said, going back to work.

"And don't cry, Judie."

"All right, I won't cry."

"And I don't know why, but don't tell Lena, not any more than you have to."

"I've decided that myself. Luckily, she doesn't even know Ralph's been here."

"That *is* lucky," I said.

"It's March, and she met Arthur in November, that's five months and she's still happy."

"I haven't seen Lena much lately," I said.

"No?" Judie said. "Well, you'd see she's in a dream. Some people are like that."

CHAPTER XXI

WHEN I went up to my apartment I found Mrs. Norton there. She already had my slippers on, the pair I had abandoned to her when she had nearly worn them threadbare without my leave, and was washing the hearth. We were having a cold, wet spell for May and fires were grateful.

I looked out of my window at the roofs shining and livid, and heard the quieted traffic of the streets. A spring rain had been falling, with its strange wetness. The gray sky overhead, with an air of clearing now, was bright and wet. A truck loaded with kegs, stacked two deep and painted red, passed by, rattling on the cobblestones; and as they moved the tops were now silver-white like mirrors with reflections of the sky, now red again.

Then clouds came suddenly along from the direction of the East River and the air died. The world looked soppy and clean, the room looked dirty.

"Make up a pot of coffee, Nordica, if you please," I said. "On a day like this we may as well have some poison."

"That's right."

"And then run down and tell Miss Judith to run in for a cup, and Lena if she's up by now."

When she had poured out coffee for Judie and Lena and me, Mrs. Norton poked up the fire and stood there with her elbow resting on the mantelpiece.

"You have some," Lena said. "Mrs. Norton, why don't you have a cup?"

Mrs. Norton shook her head.

"No, thank you, I never tasted the stuff. It's the smell."

"Nordica doesn't like coffee, nor tomatoes, nor even peaches unless somebody peels them for her——"

"That fuzz makes my flesh creep, any more'n I can stand false teeth left out on the dresser or somewhere, makes me shiver. Nor liquor."

"Nor liquor," I went on.

"But I remember how my poor mother used to swill coffee down, oh, don't I?"

"Mrs. Norton," Judie asked, "how long was it after your mother ran off from your father before you saw her again?"

I was sorry Mrs. Norton had mentioned her mother. Judie's eyes were too bright already.

"Oh, goodness knows!" I said, though she had not asked me. "Ages!"

"No, it wasn't. How long, Nordica?"

"Oh, a long time. I was married, and my Tim was seven months old. I was going on eighteen, I guess, sure I was, going on eighteen. Married when I was sixteen. I was nine when she left, so that makes nine years. She was keeping a boarding-house on Elizabeth Street. That Henry Cozens was living with her, I guess. She was working hard. She kept the house wonderful. He was drinkin' his head off."

"And how did you happen to run across her again?"

"Well, how it was, my sister was over to Jersey to see an old lady we knew who had always been a friend, you know, a family friend. And my sister asked her, 'Do you ever see our mother?' And she

says, 'Yes, she's got a boarding-house in Elizabeth Street.' So she says, 'Would you like to see your mother?' So my sister says, 'Yes, I guess so.' Well, one day she took my sister walking along Elizabeth Street. She didn't say nothing about my mother. My mother's house was one of them old-fashioned houses with slat shutters. So my mother seen my sister from behind the blinds when she was going by. So then one day after that she took my sister to see my mother. She wasn't but about fifteen then, she was three years younger'n I was. She used to go see my mother and my mother gave her some dresses and things and got her all dolled up. So one day before then, my sister says to me, 'Bessie,' she says, 'I've seen our mother!' 'Has she got cat's eyes?' I said. Wasn't that foolish, but I always had the notion since she went away she had cat's eyes."

"Mrs. Norton, what's cat's eyes?" I asked.

"Up and down, the pupils. Well, my sister says, 'What's the matter with you? Her eyes are like anybody else's.' But I said, 'I don't know, I always thought she had cat's eyes, somehow.' So my sister says would I like to go see our mother and I says I guess so. She said, 'Oh, she's all down there with a big boarding-house full of men.' I went and took the baby."

"She liked the baby?" I asked.

"No. She didn't care nothing, I guess, about children any times. So then she asked me if I was legally married. It was wrong to ask me that, for my sister had pumped her full I was married right. So I used to go down and see my mother and give her a hand with the work, I guess. She sniffed up her nose about Mr. Norton and said he wasn't good enough to marry

in her family. That was after he'd been down to see her with me, and didn't say much, just set there look-in'. So she wanted me to leave him and come stay with her. But that leaving business didn't never mean much to me, I guess."

"Did you go and stay with her?" Judie asked.

"Sure. But only a day or two at a time. There was all those men there in her house and two or three women too. I believe now they was, you know, street-walkers, but of course they didn't bring nobody in, of course. There was a lot of people there from the Museum."

I had a picture of our Metropolitan Museum and of the worthies there staying with Nordica's mother in Elizabeth Street.

"The Museum?" I asked.

"The old Globe Museum in the Bowery. There was a bricklayer named Billie Collins with my mother. And there was a Mormon with eleven wives. They practically lived in Jersey, but I suppose in them times they couldn't commute easy like they can now."

I asked Mrs. Norton what in the world a Mormon was doing living in New York.

"In the Museum," she said.

"What did he do in the Museum?"

"Displayed his family, I reckon."

Every one laughed.

"All I remember is he had a whole staircase of children, seventeen, I think it was. He had only two of his wives with him. There was a third wife confined in a hospital over in Jersey. She was the original wife, they said. I never saw them in the Museum, but he took them there, I believe, at eleven every morning, Mr. Boardman."

"It was nice you were seeing your mother again, Mrs. Norton."

"Well, it wasn't so long. There was a giant there from the Museum. So one day he says to me, 'You are a sweet girl,' and then he says, 'Where's that mail-carrier?' I says I don't know."

"What mail-carrier?" Judie asked.

"His wife was rotten. So he left her and his children to come to board with my mother. My Lord A'mighty, what a boarding-house that was! So, soon after that the mail-carrier says to me, 'You're a decent girl and a sweet girl and that giant's crazy about you, don't you let him fool you, you don't know nothing.' So then afterward the giant had his week's check, it was a hundred dollars, and you know that was the whole world of money them days. So he says to me, 'If you take a walk with me I'll give you this check. We won't be gone more'n an hour.' I was scared. I just left and I never went back to our mother's again."

"And, Mrs. Norton, did you see your mother again?" Judie asked.

"Oh, yes. And when our daddy died somebody told her and she came up. I don't know who told her. Then somebody says to her, 'You ought to go look at him; after all, he was your children's father and he's dead.' So she says, 'He ought to been dead ten years ago.' That's exactly what she said. So you know what I done? I was only eighteen. I was just a girl, but what I done, I took a handkerchief and put it over his face so she couldn't see him. God help me, I don't know if I was wrong to do it, but I did."

Judie sat there pale, listening to every word.

"Mrs. Norton," she said, "had you told your father you went to see your mother?"

"Oh, yes. After a little time I suppose he'd noticed my sister's nice things and all, and so we asked him if he'd like to go down and see my mother and he says: 'No, what I'd like to do is to throw her on the bed and throw kerosene oil on her and set her on fire. She's ruined my life.' But then we was young and we couldn't know, of course, whose fault it was and all. But look at the work ain't gettin' done."

As she disappeared through the door Judie looked after her, with tears in her eyes.

"Nordica's a grand person."

"And she's been at it since she was nine. Started then on this cleaning and scrubbing and grubbing," I said.

Lena had slipped out. "Know where Lena's gone?" Judie said. "She'd die if you mentiohed it—helping Nordica wash up."

"More coffee, Judie?"

"No, got the jumps now. Well, what I'm wondering is when Arthur will honor her with his hand and desert her, like the rest of us. I've wondered if Lena's thought of that, after Norton's story. And my little story."

"Haven't yet got to where I could mention it to him," I said. "I gather from Lena it's because he's got no money—I can't make it out."

"I can't make it out. It's not that he's an apostle of free love, or anything like that."

"No. He hates whanging around about revolutionary theories," I said.

"What will Lena's family think sooner or later when they hear of it? Hal, what'll they think?"

"You can imagine."

"Well, I'd as soon think there was some other rea-

son. When it comes to Arthur I'm ready to think the worst."

"In this what can you think?" I said.

"Oh, I don't know. The worst. I'll just have to let it go at the worst."

The rest of the day I read freshman themes. They were silly little papers written by lads who had nothing to say but were supposed to master English style by practice like this.

In the afternoon two or three students came for what were called conferences. They listened politely to the criticism of their papers and enjoyed the benefit of contact with the instructor. At the end of our talk the last student lingered to ask me a question.

"Professor Boardman, some of the fellows were saying they saw you with Miss Eleanor Dandridge in the library. You know her, then? Gee, that's wonderful!"

"We lived almost next door, down South," I said.

"Gee, don't you think she's a great actress? Look what's she's done. I think she's wonderful."

I sat afterward, thinking how calmly Judie and Arthur and I—and Lena herself for that matter—took Lena's fortunes in the theatre. It might well be thought something to be a young leading woman in New York and crowned with a success. But we all took it like that.

CHAPTER XXII

WITH spring at Columbia came the crop of offers for teachers. Over the country every year comes the breaking-up in faculties as surely as the thawing of ice on rivers and ponds. There are only a few professorships to be filled; that region is graver and more Olympian and comes to the solemn attention of presidents, trustees, and committees. But there are a multitude of lesser positions for younger men, and at the graduate colleges in larger universities the parcelling-out begins.

For these universities this is an important enterprise, an important use of the plant. The point is to find jobs for your young men and through these to establish connections with institutions all over the country; the dozen larger institutions, of course, but the smaller too, especially those in the provinces. These institutions can be helpful to the larger university in two ways. In the first place, they will need more instructors in the future, they supply positions for the university to offer. In the second place, this assurance of appointments, when they have taken their degrees, draws students to the university. This means that you recommend strongly, and even stretch a point if necessary in your recommendation, passing off on less august colleges a few fools and boobies under your great name. It is a kind of playing the game, of course, and not very lofty. But such is business in our time, and why should we expect the colleges, any more than the church or the law or anything else, to be wholly different from the society they serve?

I have always told myself, however, that Colum-

bia is not so shameless about this business as some other places.

However all that may be, the head of my department, when the request for two instructors came from Clearwater College, thought of me and Arthur. There were two instructorships: one was higher than the other, an assistant professor.

"It's your college," my superior said to me. "They want a man with some experience, they pay \$3,500. That's better than you get here. Your living is far cheaper there. By the way, what does it cost in Mississippi?"

"Well, at Clearwater," I said, "you can have a room and good board for fifty dollars a month. Two in a room, forty dollars. That's boarding-houses. Students in the dormitories can still live for thirty a month."

"Food and lodging?"

"Yes. Thirty dollars."

"Great Scott! And my lad's at St. Marks! Well, that's spilt milk, no use crying. To return to your case, it's your old college, they would be prejudiced in your favor. I advise you to take it."

When I hesitated, he said: "You can see what your chances are here. Something may come some day. In time perhaps, with good luck, some writing that will establish your standing as a scholar, and so on—you know how it is as well as I do. Not much chance here."

I agreed to go, the matter was as good as settled.

About Arthur, the fact that he was a Southerner had suggested his name to the department; he might have qualities better suited doubtless to Southern conditions. And he was a friend of mine. The position was an instructorship, the salary was two-thirds

of mine. I promised to take up the question at once with him.

Arthur had no plans—I knew that—and seemed to intend none. He had had enough teaching school to show him a way of drifting along toward a living, without much expenditure of himself and with an agreeably supercilious contempt for the profession. He thought now and then, and rather arrogantly or at least defensively, of getting some position with an editor.

When Arthur talked of submitting a book of his poems to a publisher, I advised him not to do it. He had a talent that was masculine and eloquent, often satirical and sometimes distinguished, but there was no place in present-day poetry that it could fit into, there would be no mercy for its faults and no appreciation of its virtues. I said that I would wait a while if I were he, and get the whole book more exactly what I wanted it to be. He went on and sent it, however, to a publisher, who in due time sent it back with a note saying that his readers found it too derivative, which meant, I dare say, if it meant anything, that it was not enough like the poets who are writing now.

With the editor of a magazine Arthur got so far as an interview, with an idea in his head of editorial work of some kind. But when the editor began to inquire as to what experience he had had with reading manuscripts or reviewing books, and talked of the competition in this field and so on, Arthur switched the occasion into a social turn and presently bade the editor good day, graciously, I suppose, as if refusing to compete at all. He was too proud to be looked over like a prospective candidate or to fight for patronage. The offer of the college position at such a

moment was like fate, both a good and an evil fate.

As I walked along I was troubled over my mission.

Meanwhile all this time, I thought, so far as Lena's affairs were concerned, *The Rose Sleep* was flourishing with its success, and by virtue of its long run had begun to be spoken of as the greatest American play of the season. Kelly began to think his play would win the Pulitzer prize. Since so many people had liked it and its publicity agent had obtained so much space for it in the newspapers, you could go to it without tiresome judgments or making up your mind either one way or another. It was simply a fine play and you could take it or leave it. The actors, with the critical pressure forgotten and the audiences so well disposed, took things easier and were more natural than ever. Repetition had made them play together with more ease, too; and its popularity had made them proud to be in the play. And finally the time had already arrived in its history when *The Rose Sleep* was playing to transients; three-quarters of the house was filled with these passing visitors to New York who take their opinions of a play from its newspaper publicity and make their choice as to what they will attend from conversations on the train as they speed toward town. Some of them wait to take the advice of the hotel clerk. The upshot of it all was that the actors in *The Rose Sleep* were envied by their friends for sharing in such a success; its producer was envied for his good luck; and the play got sillier than ever and promised to run through the summer and into the new season.

CHAPTER XXIII

ARTHUR's door was open and Percy Cheney was standing near it with his hat in his hand, as if he had started to go. Arthur was talking.

"All those three will treat you royally," he was saying. "All friends of mine."

"Thanks, that's corking, damn corking of you," Cheney said.

He was a tall, thin young man with a heavy mouth and chin, and plunging red hair. This past season he had tutored in our English department. It had been understood that he was a coming novelist who had to support himself. But his grandmother in Hartford had just died and left him a million dollars' worth of stock in an ammunition factory. He had asked for a leave before the term was out, which had been willingly granted, since he had proved to be a nuisance to the department and would have been dropped anyhow in June.

I could not understand why Arthur should be making himself so agreeable; he had hated Cheney and never failed to ignore him. Now he was smiling that smile that he could make so flattering, and his voice was warm and candid.

"So you'll be in Paris in ten days from now. At the Dome, I'll swear, this hour ten days from now. Or will it be Pocardi's? The gods eat there. Lucky devil!"

"I suppose," Cheney said, turning his yellow eyes around the room languidly, as if one place were as good as another in this world.

"You've taken your ticket?" Arthur persisted. "It's all settled?" I could not make out why he should be so interested.

"Yes," Cheney said. "And I got the passport at last."

"Then, *bon voyage*, old chap! Drink a calvados for me under the horse-chestnuts. They'll be in bloom."

"Good-by."

We shook hands with Percy Cheney and Arthur closed the door after him. I sat down by the window and looked at Arthur where he sat on the couch against a piece of Italian brocade that he had brought with him from Europe. It was purple, the color of ripe grapes.

He looked proud and superb, with his dark hair and white skin, with the red around his eyes, and that strong, tapering neck that came up so straight from the flat line of his back. But the smiling manner was gone, his expression was cold and full of malicious satisfaction.

"But, Arthur," I said, "for the love of God! What's the idea?"

"Want to get him out of town. Anything to speed the parting." He was trying to sound casual and impulsive. "Sick of the sight of him, the damn fool. Paris needs him. Am I clear?"

"Very," I said, "though I don't understand."

"Shall we forget him?" Arthur said.

I saw a sheaf of papers on his table, in Arthur's writing, and in verse. I knew better than to take them up or to say much, for his poetry was a touchy subject with Arthur. He was too proud to be a poet,

though he would have been glad to be a famous poet.

I only pointed over to the papers and said lightly:

"You seem to be pouring it out these days, old son."

"What?" he said. "Oh, that. Hal, I swear I do seem to be getting prolific, something's struck a gusher in me."

"Do you feel it's come off well?"

"Oh, I suppose so. Here are some notes—lines out of my head—sitting here last night after I got back from Eleanor's, had an idea, a dying poet saying farewell to the world, to all he'd loved in the world—not so bad, do you think?"

"Sounds fine," I said. "Do I see it?"

"Oh, yes, hell yes, but stick it in your pocket—you can read it some other time—when I'm not around."

"Good," I said. "I'll bring it back."

He reached over to a pile of papers.

"And by the way, what do you think of this letter? I got it this morning. Beautiful letter."

I read a letter written by a Miss Gladys Cowl from somewhere in town. She was a nobody and he was famous, but she had cut out his poem from a magazine and had been reading it for two days. She wished it had been a thousand lines instead of twelve. Sitting at her window looking down Park Avenue she would repeat his words over and over to herself. So many people wished to know him, perhaps, but if ever he had time to spare she would like to meet him. Whatever happened, she wanted to tell him what a great poet he was.

Arthur had not had many poems published and

this was his first admiring letter, or rather his first mash note, as Lena's stage friends would have called it.

"Well?" he said, when I stopped reading.

"Well, as Lena's father would have said, she writes well."

"Meaning you don't think much of it," Arthur frowned.

"Well, I suppose it's nice to get," I said.

"It's good of her to tell me her opinion. Perhaps you don't think much of her opinion?"

"Well, *great* is quite a word. Any one who thinks you're as good as that can't know how really good you are. It's like the Blue Grotto and the people that rave about it. If it's as fine as they say it is, it's finer than they'd be able to see."

Arthur laughed and turned away from the papers.

"Well, then, meanwhile what's this you have to tell me? Something's cramped your style, Hal."

I told him my commission, described the place in Clearwater College, making it sound as boring as I could.

As I talked Arthur got up and went to stand by the window.

"Well?" I said at last.

He turned and looked at me.

"Well, Hal, thanks. I must think about it."

"I should say so, old man."

"Got to talk it over with Eleanor, too."

But I could see by everything about him that he knew he would go. He would accept the offer.

What Lena would say to it I did not know. I would tell Judie and Lena, we agreed, and we would all meet next day for tea at the Casino in Central Park.

I still failed to understand what Arthur wanted to do with Cheney, hurrying him off to Europe; and could still see Arthur's cordial smile and Cheney's flapping lips.

CHAPTER XXIV

As I went across to Riverside and on down along the walk above the river, I could not get out of my mind the thought of the ruin and waste in life. This would be a turning-point for Eleanor and Arthur; there would be wonderful moments, wonderful days even, but never again what they had now.

I went into the little place where the Florentine waiter had given us the mint and Lena and I had talked about her plans for the theatre, and drank a glass of vermouth, French vermouth, bitter and heartening. Then I went along for a block or two and sat down on one of the benches by the railing. Yellow forsythia bushes were blooming near by and bees were humming in them. I read the notes for Arthur's poem; his poetry was different since he had loved Eleanor, I had already seen that and could see it even in these notes.

These notes for the poet's farewell to the world filled my mind after I had put the manuscript into my pocket again. There were jottings for several themes to be used in the poem. Lines from it came back to me:

"A strange wind bloweth on my heart,
And on mine eyes falls the eternal twilight,"

I repeated. And then——

"I look upon the hills
And the eternal homesickness on them,
They are the hail and farewell of the earth."

I was not thinking of whether it was good poetry or not, but of how close it was to Arthur, which means that I was thinking of Lena, of her and him. I could see Lena, back at home, standing at the window looking out over the country. The hills were the hail and farewell of the earth, Arthur had written that, I was thinking. Bless him—may God bless those who love the earth as the image of birth and death in their passionate souls!

A drunken city bum staggered up to the railing near me and propped himself against it. He stood swaying from side to side, with his eyes closed. I could smell the sweat and grease in his clothes. Then he belched and dropped his head forward and spit. It was all exact, natural, beastly. "Life can be like that," I said to myself as I sat thinking. Life could be like that. But life was exalted too. Exaltation arose in us like hunger, came to us like thirst, like any biological force in our bodies; it moved in us as the wind moves in a tree. We feel the hundred things in us that rise like towers. And each one of them not a tower but a flight, as they say of the Mangia in Siena. To the east of me now and to the south rose the towers of New York.

Arthur and Eleanor loved each other. If only they had died then. The soul of each had sought and found its perfection; and for that moment, at least, in their lives each one might have said: "I have become universal. I see things in their divine innocence."

The man staggered on to a bench not far away, stretched himself out on it, and lay with his head resting on his arms. The evening light spread under the trees. North to south, across the river, through

the misty air there were strong bands of cloud, golden gray; between them a pale yellow sky was quivering. The river was soft as the sky.

The figure of Arthur came to my mind as he had sat just now on the couch before the old Italian hanging. Eleanor must have seen him like that, I thought. She had looked at Arthur there again and again. She had sat watching him. And in the purple splendor of the cloth he seemed to her in the splendor of his own blood.

CHAPTER XXV

"WELL, and what of *Tosca*?" I said next day when we had got ourselves settled at the Casino and ordered tea; Friday there had been some sort of special matinée of *La Tosca*. "I'm off opera myself, all but Mozart, in which they put Marion Talley, who sings like a canary in a boarding-school, and Gluck's *Orpheus*, which they don't give. How was it?"

"I liked it," Lena said. "I loved it."

"With Jeritza thrown in?"

"Yes, I loved it. Really."

"Oh, but, Lena, you couldn't," I said.

"Yes, Hal, Eleanor liked it even after your Casals," Arthur said. "We heard him just last Sunday. I must say I'd as lief have his 'cello as Jeritza's voice."

"Which one do you mean?" I asked. "She has three."

Judie struck the back of my hand. "Oh, get out, you old devil!"

"No, honestly," I said. "As I remember her *Tosca* she's always changing her register. I remember in the *Vissi d'arte* she suddenly has a phonograph Italian voice and Italian attack, after a German evening so far. And, Judie, didn't she come into the church without a hat? Perhaps I've forgotten."

"Oh, is it a church, Hal? I thought it was a studio."

"Church, you crazy."

"Of course, it looked pretty superswell. I suppose I took it for a sort of operatic studio."

"It's a church all right, Judie, you ought to know a church."

"Oh, I know a church, but I just don't know opera; went to please Lena; I don't belong, don't go. I always think, oh, no, wouldn't I be a bastard sitting up at opera?"

"Yes," Arthur persisted. "Eleanor liked it."

"I think I know what she means," I said.

I knew what Lena had done. All the trash and poor singing had gone past her. She had taken a hint from the opera and gone on making a beautiful one of her own.

"At that Casals concert," Arthur said, "I couldn't help noticing the audience. What a rest it was from the theatre audience! Makes me sick, the people who come out of the theatres. They seem to me one of three things: pigs or starved women or college students."

Lena said nothing and Judie looked at me. I felt sorry for him and the jealousy that made him suffer.

"Well, what of Mr. Boardman?" Judie broke in. "Where've you been, Professor, what have you been seeing?"

The night before, I said, since it was the last performance, and to please an editor who had invited me, and out of respect to my cultured position at Columbia University, I had been obliged to see a performance of Sophocles' *Œdipus, King*, by a visiting English actor who had begun as a matinée idol and advanced to what he meant to be Reinhardt productions of the classics. So there we were.

"And how was it?" Judie asked.

"Well, he was surrounded by a male chorus in wagging beards and long robes, who looked neither classic nor majestic but only obese. He himself

played *Œdipus* without a beard and with a quite naturalistic make-up, thin lips, white arms and all. I felt as if I were seeing a sort of pregnant curate."

Judie laughed—"And then?"

"Oh, no, let's not talk any more about it."

"All right."

"Because I want to talk about Mississippi."

Eleanor looked quickly at me.

"What is it, Lafe?" she said.

"It's your Clearwater University. An assistant professorship or associate professorship, I can never remember which. They told me yesterday but I can't remember. It's next to the professor in rank, I know. In some colleges they associate. And in some they assist."

"Princely salary?" Judie asked, looking at Lena. I saw what she was after. She was setting herself up against Arthur.

"Yes," I said, "better'n I get now. And you live there for nothing."

"So?"

"Aren't eggs down there about twelve cents a dozen?"

"If you live on eggs," Judie said.

"And Arthur?" Lena asked, trying to control herself.

"He has an offer too. An instructorship. That's the rank just under mine. He's had less experience here at Columbia, you see."

"More princely salary?" Judie asked.

"Thousand less than mine. Better again than here."

"It's better than reading high-school themes or freshman themes," Arthur said in a sullen tone.

"Is it?" Lena said, turning to me.

"I suppose so," I said. "It depends."

Judie said: "I don't know about that."

Lena frowned, and then looked quickly up at me with a smile.

"I'm sick of being strapped," Arthur burst out.

"It's not much fun," I agreed, just to say something.

"Good and sick of it!"

"Why, Lena's rich now," Judie said. "Filthy rich, aren't you, darling?"

Arthur turned red. "That's not my affair," he said, proudly. Judie lit a cigarette. "That's not my affair."

"Well," don't get sore about it," she said.

"I beg your pardon."

"Sure. Well, what about Mississippi, hasn't Mencken said there was nothing in it?"

"Shall I answer your question, Judie?" I said.

"Briefly, sweet."

Well, then, before the Civil War, I said, Mississippi was a little world of people from Virginia and the Carolinas, and almost all one blood, Anglo-Saxon, Scotch-Irish. The rest were negro slaves and hillbillies, poor whites who owned no slaves and lived up in the back country. In the war many of the best class were killed off. After the war carpet-baggers moved in from everywhere, and the poor whites came down into the towns. Now they run the State. Mississippi had lost her way, I said, what she was doing now was trying to follow the rest of the country.

"Just a low world any way you take it," Judie cried, clapping her hands, all stained with her batik dyes.

Arthur began: "Well, I'd like the change. I'm sick of Times Square faces. Go down Broadway and you see 'em, go down Fifth Avenue. You see one woman after another with a face like a painted oyster. All exactly the same, like a cake of butter rouged."

"Rehearsing a satire, son?" Judie said. "And aren't there any men on Times Square?"

"And what else is there?" he said. "Especially since they've told me at Columbia that they won't have anything for me next year."

Lena looked at him pitifully. "Really, Arthur?" she said. "Did they say that?"

"Yes. They pass the places along to the graduate students, they as good as told me so, yesterday."

That of course was a lie. I suppose he had told her lies before, but this was the first time I had heard him.

Otherwise I had heard Arthur lie often enough. I had often observed his habit of saying almost anything that would save the situation or get a difficult moment by; and I thought I had figured out the origin of it. His mother, from what he seemed to remember about her, was an intense, hysterical woman, who loved him with an enveloping, passionate jealousy. She got her way with all her family by sulking or tears or storms of temper. She would go into a tantrum, make any kind of accusation. Before he was eight Arthur had got into the habit of saying anything that would quiet her and get him past a crisis. This way of managing he still kept; he would tell you anything that would serve the moment.

It was only another instance of the fact that, for

all his qualities, Arthur had at bottom no character at all.

"I'd like to see how the South strikes me after being away so long," Arthur said, presently, changing to a more reasonable tone.

"How long is it?" I asked.

"Three years in the war, then south again teaching in Georgia, five years, and then two years here."

"That's five in all you've been away."

"Yes. And I'd like to try it again."

Lena sat looking intently at him, saying nothing.

"And I think I could write better there," he said, looking into her eyes, "or for a year at least. To stay longer would, I suppose, be out of the question."

"And what of you?" Judie asked, as she offered Lena a cigarette.

"Well," Lena said, "of course I'm acting here in New York, Judie."

"And there's no theatre in Clearwater, I guess. Few dramatic openings, doubtless?"

"Doubtless," Arthur said, coldly.

"But I doubt Arthur's going," Lena said. "It's another kind of life he'd have. That Southern life gets into your bones in a funny way, I mean for an artist it's so. Don't you think so, Arthur?"

"That we can't know till we've been there. True, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"But I don't think we should go."

"Is that dramatic instinct?" he said.

Lena flushed but did not answer.

"Well, old top, speaking of instinct," Judie said, "my artistic instinct hasn't been asked but it leads me to inquire what about Lena in this project of yours?"

"Wouldn't do Eleanor any harm, a year of study and time to think," he said. "If she's to be an artist. What's the matter with them now is——"

"Oh, my God, don't tell us what's the matter with the artists! Everybody's always telling us!" Judie rapped her cup with the spoon.

"Waiter, I'd like another pot of tea, if I've got to hear what's the matter with the artists."

"What's the matter with them now is they've nothing to say, nothing but babble. In the theatre even worse. That's why I can't remember one actor from another. Why should I be interested in such people as I can see in the subway any time. More interesting, as a matter of fact. Why should I remember the difference between these actors?"

Judie poured her tea.

"No reason, for that matter," she said.

"I don't think we ought to go. It would be foolish," Lena said.

Arthur stood up. The vein on his forehead was showing.

"That means you care nothing for me."

"Rot," Judie said, pulling at his elbow. "Sit down, Arthur. People will think——"

But Lena stood up too. "No," she said, "let's walk down to the little bridge there, Arthur, and talk it over."

"That's better. We'll wait," I said.

We saw them going down the walk toward the stream and the rustic bridge over it, Arthur expostulating for a while and then quiet. The music of the carousel, with its horns and twanging claps like drums and tambourines, sounded far away through the park. Arthur and Eleanor stood on the bridge talking. We sat watching them.

"I swear there must be scores of people," Judie burst out, "who think Lena's an idiot. The way she abandons herself utterly to sentiment."

"Not to sentiment," I objected.

"Well, to what she's feeling in life, then. It's not as if she were a fool and didn't know."

"And that makes all the difference," I said. "Anything that Lena does she knows the cost. That's why she's wonderful."

"She thinks nothing's important but——"

"What is important?"

"I suppose so," Judie agreed.

"You know it——"

"I know you can get up in the air when you talk about her."

"Perhaps," I said.

"And she'll love you yet."

I said: "I know you think that, but don't. When I was a boy, a boy's devotion, but that's long ago."

"Nobody understands her as you do."

"But that proves nothing," I said. "Nothing about love."

"No. Nothing." She pressed her poor lips together.

After a while we saw Arthur and Lena coming back. They were nearing the pavilion. Lena was pale, her eyes were large and happy. She was walking with that sweet movement of hers, a lovely single unity in all her body, that was one of her stage secrets. Judie watched them coming up the steps.

"It's settled," she said.

"I suppose she'll do what he wants," I said.

"Oh, yes. The jig's up."

"Arthur looks quite calm," I said.

"He's calm because he remembers only what he wants to remember," Judie said.

Looking at them thus as they came toward us, I realized more than ever that it was the man in him, not the poet, that Lena loved. Not the physical male, not just that; he was the being that completed her as a woman, that was her complement. He understood little of her, he was the far extreme from her. He was the male, plus heightened nerves, strong senses, and strong impulses. He had power. He had a mystery like that of nature. I wondered whether all great love affairs are like that, are between natures that are so whole and so different from each other; and whether you throw yourself against this being so different from you as you throw yourself on the universe, all your soul, all your secret desires, all your mystery.

And Arthur loved Eleanor. Walking beside her now on the spring day, he had in his face and in his whole bearing that look of humility and worship that always moved her so.

CHAPTER XXVI

WE went along the walks of the Park toward 59th Street, heading for a restaurant on Lexington Avenue. On our way we stopped at the foot of the little knoll that overlooks the pond and climbed to the top of it. The young grass had come out around the boulders and flat rocks; the path, the young trees, the wild flowers had begun their spring. The swan boats were out.

The restaurant in Lexington Avenue was one of those places where the soup is good if somewhat scant, and where, if not the quality of the food, at least the progression of the courses, seems well considered and civilized.

For one reason or another, every one in our party was happy.

"So the Southerners are going South," Judie said.

We began to talk of the South.

What of the Southerners in New York? There were good and there were bad. Many charming people from the South came back-stage to congratulate Lena. The publicity agent had placed her in the news as a little Southern girl. But there was a kind of professional Southerner we hated, the kind of person who is Southern when he is in New York and New Yorker when he is South, anything for the distinction of being different.

Were Southern people kinder than Northerners? Judie thought they were; what did we think? I had a theory: they were not necessarily any kinder; but the most natural thing in the world to human beings

was kindly feelings toward other human beings, and these feelings got more exercise in Southerners because Southerners let off all their feelings more easily, and are more expressive. It came to the same thing, Judie said, then they were kinder. But I would not agree to that.

Arthur maintained that at any rate there was less nonsense in the South than in New England at least. There was less cant, less of that business of solemn, plausible names for things; when something is stupid calling it simple; when it is poverty-stricken calling it restrained, and so on, constant moralizing and subjective cant. I agreed to that only on one ground: there was not less nonsense in the South but fewer varieties. Not so many classifications. You would not call three things by three cant names, such for instance as service, conscience, culture. But if you felt conservative, bombastic and amorous you would have one name, gallant.

"But you grant that you prefer our kind of nonsense?" Arthur said.

"I do," I said; "I was born to it."

"Honey, you'll have to forgive us, talking South, South, South; it's because we're all going back to our own soil," Lena said to Judie.

Judie kissed Lena's hand.

"My dear, I love it, and there it's ten, but I'm not going yet." She said that because the clock on the wall was striking and Lena had moved as if she thought of going home. "I'll stay for a liqueur, Hal, you're not rushing."

"Leave me the check," I said to Arthur. "You can do it next time."

The waiter let the two of them out of the door and came back to our table.

"Madame?" he said, leaning over Judie.

She said, "No, I don't want a liqueur, thank you. I only want to ask a question."

"What is it, Madame?"

"I mean this gentleman."

"I beg your pardon, Madame."

"That's all right. You can answer next time."

We paid the bill and left. The lock of the iron door clicked behind us.

Outside the air was clear and cool. The moon had come up and hung now directly over the street, the walls of the Shelton and the houses alongside seemed still and remote in the silver light.

"Well, there's another beautiful thing going on the rocks!"

"What do you mean, Judie?" I asked.

"Lena and this affair with Arthur. You know going South, to the country and family and all—that's the end of everything."

"I don't know what to think," I said.

"Hal, will he ever put it over in poetry?"

"He could but he won't. I don't think so. He'd always be glad to have done it, but he won't do it."

"I guess that's one reason she gathers him up in her arms."

"You'd know that better than I would," I said.

"Well, you tell me this, then, what I wanted to ask you. Look how I'm not painting—even the Blue Dragon has kicked me out. Madame herself liked my murals, but the patrons who come there to eat her sixty-cent lunches say the trees look unnatural. So she's lost her nerve. Too bad after she's painted the front of the house that blue. My batik keeps on, I can do two in a day. And that's enough for the

week—it's seventy dollars the two. But what's the use?"

"But that's not what you want to ask me?"

"I've got an invitation to go to Bermuda. I used to think that was down among the West Indies, around Hayti, I suppose, but now I find it's just sort of out in the ocean. It would be very de luxe—oh, Egyptian! So I say, why not go?"

"But, Judie dear," I said, "do you love the man?"

"No, of course not."

"Then?"

"There are two of them, both been asking me."

"Oh," I said.

"They're both about the same, you see. Both rather fat."

"And you don't love them?"

"Him? No, neither one. Can't say I've got a lech on either one."

"Then, obviously, it's nonsense."

"Very de luxe and warm there, and a blue sea; flowers too."

"You can't get away from what you are; you can put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"The hell you say!"

"You know I'm talking sense."

"You sweet old thing!"

"You know I'm right."

"I know you used to tell me I couldn't act like an onion and expect to smell like a violet. Yes, but that was long ago."

"In your salad days, so to speak."

"What I know is that from this on you'll see me leading the golden life. I tried life simple, but look what happened, what'd I draw? From this on I'm going to have life different."

"But, Judie, darling, you can't talk about life as if it were a string of beads. Life by itself like that just doesn't exist, that's all. It comes out in what you think or do—don't be silly."

"Well, you'll see all the same," she persisted.

"Oh, doubtless."

"I've paid long enough."

"Might as well say you'd been yourself long enough."

"Well, get that taxi, and I'll ride down with you weeping like I did in Central Park the other day, only then I was by myself. I howled so the driver stopped the car, he thought we'd run over a dog."

We took a taxi and started toward Grand Central Station. I meant to drive home down Park Avenue but Judie asked to be dropped at Clover Gardens.

"I'm dancing there with him," she said. "It's too chic—you can rent a partner if you have to."

When I got out of the taxi at my door I could see the whole end of Grove Street to the south filled with moonlight, which filled the sky too above the low houses and fell on the little tower of St. Luke's on the other side of Hudson Street, whose noisy traffic was all gone at this hour. The pale light came through the windows into my room.

I undressed and went to bed. I took the Catullus from the little Venetian bookcase at the head of my bed, but for a while did not open it; I lay looking at the picture by Maurice Sterne that hung on my wall. It was a head done in oil and oil paint mixed with wax; a young man's head with curling short hair. The drawing was made up all of subtle planes strongly marked. The beautiful, almost morbid mouth quivered with some strange reality within;

the look in the slanting eyes was like a quivering obsession, but firmly stated by the painter. The picture reminded you of Crete or more perhaps of one of those late Greek portraits from Alexandria, though far better painted; that was it, it had an African exoticism and beauty. But it had a new soul, a new intensity.

I turned from the painting to Catullus' poem about spring and voyaging. The poem told how now the spring brings back the gentle warmths, now the mind is eager to wander, we long for the famous cities of Asia. I was happy.

Then I knew all of a sudden what had been lighting me inside: I would go to Italy again. When the college year was over I would take a boat to Italy. Then I lay in the dark, with scarcely a thought, for a long time.

After a while I began to think of the classic poetry, how much its clarity endured, and how much it had of the long sigh of time. I thought of Sappho's poem of the evening, that brings together again what the morning scattered, that brings back the sheep, the goat, the child to his mother's knee. In my mind I could see Arthur and Lena walking along the street outside in the full moonlight before St. Luke's, and wondered how it would be for them down home and if they would walk in those clear evenings in the South.

I thought of the little hill in Central Park by 59th Street, how a young shepherd might well be there with his flock, blowing his pipe in the shade all day, as familiar to the place as Amyntas was to the farm when Virgil wrote, "not even Delia is better known to our dogs." I could almost hear the bells

at home ringing and see Lena and Arthur walking together in the garden. Then I thought again of the little hill in the park with its young grass and winding path, under the late spring moon.

CHAPTER XXVII

HENRY SIMPSON had gone to all the trouble of telephoning to Columbia for my address, and one day when I was reading *The Cherry Orchard* he turned up in Barrow Street.

I had met him several times in Paris during the war when he had come to town on leave from the government school in the Midi, where he was directing amateur dramatics among the soldiers. Since the war he had been teaching in a boys' school in Massachusetts. His father was a lawyer, his grandfather a bishop. I had heard once from Simpson since the Armistice, in a letter so like him that it was one of my treasures still; I kept it in a pet file of mine. The letter was on a single sheet of note-paper, single-line typing; it made four points:

His students in dramatics were giving a production of that famous early comedy *Gammer Gurton's Needle* and he would be pleased if I could come up to see it and review it for some periodical. He was sorry not to be able to invite me to stay at his house but doubtless some of my friends in Boston, which was so near, would put me up. The production, he felt sure, was highly worth while in itself, superior to others so far given. If I came, perhaps I could arrange to come on Thursday or Friday, since the house could be more easily sold out on Saturday.

When that letter came I howled with delight. Not a word about me, about anything I might have written, not even asking how I was. He was thinking only that he wanted something. He began with that,

and then he could not bring himself to its costing him anything. First, my lodging, and then even the loss of a ticket sale. For all the bishop and culture behind him, he was a pig and egoist. But how much smarter to have at least pretended some interest in somebody else!

Simpson never said what he did not mean merely for the purpose of giving you pleasure. Such a thing he would have considered insincere. That was character. Only when he wished to get something out of you would he say what he did not mean; but that was business. He wanted something now and made himself very agreeable about it. Face to face with me, he was most solicitous.

"I have seen some of your things in the magazines; liked them very much." He smiled.

"Thanks. Nice to tell me."

"Not at all. I've heard many compliments for them."

"I'm glad," I said, trustfully.

"In fact, I liked them very much. I found them brilliant."

"That's fine. I'm so glad," I said.

It seemed as well to let him go on and to take it all simply. Let him flatter me; it could do no harm. Once he said these things, the next step was that he would try to believe them. He was not the kind who could say to himself, "You liar," and go on using his lie to serve his purpose. No, he would have to say to himself: "Well, after all, old Boardman is pretty smart; it's the truth, I was not lying."

Simpson said too much and stayed too long, but taste was not one of his virtues. He had understood, he said, from some one or other that Eleanor Dand-

ridge was a friend of mine. He had seen her in *The Rose Sleep*, which was a worthless play and a poor part, but one could see that she was good. He would be glad to have her do a play of his. Simpson rather suddenly took the manuscript from a leather folio.

"I'll be glad to have you take it to her," he said. "She's really excellent."

"So this is what Lena is running into these days," I thought. The life of a successful young actress. Scores of plays by Simpsions, scores of Simpsions with plays.

When he was gone I turned to *The Cherry Orchard*, finished the last act, and sat there thinking of the Russian people. How simply they came into your life when you knew them, what goodness they have and gentle affections! They seem to us warm and straightforward, they have power to give life. Their hearts are pure, their nerves are still the nerves of Tartars. I thought of the Moscow Art Theatre's performance of *The Cherry Orchard*, so alive in every part, so generously created and felt, and done with such perfection and after such long labor.

From that performance of *The Cherry Orchard* the picture of the little governess played by Maria Ouspenskaya began to stand out in my mind. It was a small part, but she expressed all the plaintive grotesque that there is to that figure running in and out of the scene and from one small angle reflecting as much as any one there the careless ruin of that family. Later I had seen Ouspenskaya in *The Brothers Karamazov*. In the midst of Dostoievsky's terrible theme hers was a very small part indeed; she was one of the peasant crowd in the tavern

scene. For an instant Ouspenskaya stepped out from the crowd and sang. It was such a bawling, wild sound as was never heard. It swept the play, electrified the scene, made your back freeze. You saw this great actress in these two parts or as the dying woman in Gorki's *Lower Depths*. You felt the ferocity and fire of her nature, its tenderness, felt the devotion and sweet goodness. To her great gift for feeling she added truthfulness.

Suddenly the thought leapt into my mind of what a fine thing it would be for Lena if she could study with Ouspenskaya. Ouspenskaya was here in New York. She had stayed in America when the Moscow Art Theatre returned to Europe and was teaching at the school that Richard Boleslavsky, who had also resigned from the company, had founded.

I put down my book and looked at my watch. It was past four. I was feeling very proud of myself as I descended the stairs to Lena's room.

Lena was sitting by a tea-table with Arthur and Judie. Tea was over and they were smoking.

I said I had had tea, and Arthur gave me a cigarette and lighted it for me. But Lena knew better. She insisted on the tea.

They were discussing the spring exhibition at the Academy.

"If they'd paint these things on drum-heads, coal-scuttles, dressing-tables, anything," Judie said, "I could see the point of it. Art as life's handmaiden, yes. But not on the wall in frames; that's where I get off."

While Judie went charging on with the Academy I sat looking at my cup and saucer. They were one of three that Lena had picked up in Naples. The china

was a black lustre with gold chinoiserie; figures and pagodas and willow-trees beautifully drawn. The handle of the cup was white, with a little gold on the edges. They were porcelain from the factory of the Bourbons, who brought their craftsmen down from Sevres to Naples. The Italian touch was in the white handle, it gave character to the cup.

I was looking at the porcelain, so full of skill and sure tradition, and was thinking of my plan for Lena. Otherwise, with the Kellys and what not on Broadway to learn from, where would she get any skill or tradition or anything except what she could teach herself with practice? The Academy show was at last buried, and there was silence for a moment.

"I've got a plan for you, Lena," I said.

She turned to me with that friendly, happy look in her eyes.

"Me?"

"You've made a fine start. The practical side of it is settled. If *The Rose Sleep* closed you'd have dozens of offers."

"In silly plays," Arthur said, frowning.

I mentioned Simpson's play, which I had put on the table as I came in. Arthur, too, had known him in Paris. The play was called *Islands*. I knew it was only one more of the dozens that were coming to Lena these days. Most of them she turned over to Kelly, who had a little pale woman reading for him month in and month out. Lena glanced over where the manuscript lay, and repeated the title.

"*Islands*? I read two or three plays with Arthur, but not any lately."

"We couldn't bear it," Arthur said.

"But this plan isn't for *Islands*, is it, Lafe?"

"No."

"We couldn't bear the plays we read," Arthur repeated.

"I've something to propose," I said.

I began to talk about Ouspenskaya and of what it would mean for Lena to be taught by such a woman and such an artist. I described Stanislavsky's method, which I knew something of; it is a fine method.

Lena's eyes were round and bright. She sprang up and threw her arms around my neck.

"You darling!" she cried. "Hal, I'll always love you."

"That's nice," I said.

"But how'll I do, Hal, do I go to see her? I could telephone her—" Lena asked. She went on, jumping up plans for the new project. "What do you think, Arthur?" she asked finally. "You haven't said what you think."

He resented being left out so long.

"I don't know. I never saw the Moscow Art Theatre," he said.

"But you've heard of them."

"Oh, yes. They're best in realism, aren't they?"

"Yes," I said. "Much better in realism. And in realism better than anybody else."

Arthur got up and went to the window. "Lena, if we're going to walk to the theatre, we'll have to be starting," he said.

He wanted her to be happy, but he could not help feeling jealous of anything she did away from him.

"I'd love walking," she said.

"I may drop in a moment and see your second act," Judie called, as they went out. "Before I go dancing."

When the door closed I turned to Judie.

"Lena's play'll run on forever, that's sure," I said, "and she'll stay in it till September at least. She may as well have something to fill in with."

"Of course. And to be thrown with such an artist as Ouspenskaya! Arthur'll keep her from it if he can. She'll never get to do it; you watch," Judie said. "What's Arthur going to do this summer?"

"He's got a job in the summer school."

"Columbia?"

"Yes."

"He makes me so damned sick!" she said.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THERE was nothing to do in the long spring afternoons, and on Sunday it was too warm to walk the streets and too many people there. You could take a subway or taxi to a train and the train to a town in the country or Long Island, or you could take an hour getting out of town in an automobile with miles of solid gas as you groped along in the line of cars. I was too Southern and too rural for all that. I liked the country near at hand and a garden under the window if possible. It seemed easier to drop down to Lena's and Judie's for tea.

Arthur was there.

"Go on, Judie," Lena said, making my tea. "Hal, Judie's been having one of her talks with Mrs. Norton."

"Nordica's inexhaustible; there's no angle on life she can't match. What's this now, Judie?" I said.

"Well, I said something about cremation, I think it was when I let the percolator burn up, and Norton said: 'That's something I've seen done.' She told me how when her mother's second husband was cremated the law required some member of the family to be present, and her mother wouldn't go, so Mrs. Norton had to do it. He always said he was going to be cremated when he died and he wanted his ashes scattered off the Staten Island ferry. They put the ashes in a vase and they were a long time at the undertaker's place and her mother said she'd get them some time. Then the undertaker said they'd been there a year and he needed the room. So Mrs.

Norton said: 'Well, I'm not going to chase around with it, it's too heavy.' So he took the ashes around himself and her mother set them in the closet on a shelf. So Jim Barker, who had been a sort of sweetheart of her mother's, she supposed, and had come to live with her after her husband died, used to say: 'Look, Flora, when you going to throw them ashes of yours off the ferry?' And she'd say: 'Oh, go on, I'll do it some time when I get around to it. You go do it, why don't you?' But he said: 'No, it's your party.'

"Well, the ashes stayed there, so one day Jim Barker came in and said: 'Look, Flora, it's a nice day and not so much wind to blow around, how about scattering your ashes?' So she said, 'All right.' So they went out and threw the ashes off the Staten Island boat by request and then took the Coney Island boat."

Judie clapped her hands for joy over our dear Nordica.

"Tell Hal about the parrot," Arthur said to Judie.

His tone sounded amused but too easy. I turned to Judie almost too loyally:

"Judie, darling, what about the parrot?"

"Don't you adore it?" she laughed.

"What?"

"Well, there was a woman came to board and brought with her a parrot who used to sit on the window-sill and every time anybody passed he'd say: 'If you got a dollar, come up-stairs. If you got a dollar, come up-stairs.' Oh, it was awful! 'If you got a dollar, come up-stairs.' So her mother said. 'If you don't wring that son-of-a-bitch's neck the police will be up here.'"

"Bless Nordica's old heart!" Lena said, and Arthur laughed. Judie looked at her watch.

"But I'll be late," she said. "Aye, aye, aye! I'm due at tea, it's really cocktails."

I rose when she went out. Arthur remained where he was lounging on the couch.

I was not wrong about the tone. When Judie had gone away to her engagement on Charles Street, Eleanor went over to the window and stood looking out. She turned and glanced at Arthur as if about to speak, but said nothing. He felt it, for his face stiffened. He lit a cigarette.

"I'll be getting on," I said. "Got some English papers to read."

"No, Hal, don't you think you must go. There's no use saying it again, but I've told Arthur I wish he'd treat Judie differently."

"How did I treat her?" he said.

"Oh, you know, Arthur. This air of taking her any sort of way. As if we needn't bother to respect her."

"I hope I respect all women."

"Don't talk rot."

"Thanks."

"Respect her soul, I mean."

He turned to me. "There's no use saying it again, but I've told Eleanor I never know what people mean when they talk about the soul."

Lena said nothing, but went on standing by the window. I knew exactly what she meant. Judie's natural goodness meant nothing to Arthur. Her enthusiasm for beauty he ranked as gush. He could not see the kind of rash, chaotic honesty she had. He could not value her restless, inventive talent and

lonely energy. What he saw was that she swore and said rough things and, before she met Ralph, had had love affairs with men and passing affairs that came from bad nerves and from a sort of despair. She was too candid and had no pride. She lacked pride and taste, telling you about herself as she did. He was able to take her very easily, and to despise with less and less concern the off-hand way she sometimes took him. His attitude was not very consistent with the harangues I had listened to from Arthur on the subject of the emasculation that Victorianism and feminism have brought into our conversation these days.

"Oh, for a blackguarding old duchess! A smutty old grand thing, splendid and grave when there was need but Rabelaisian when the devil pleased her. Suiting herself!" he said.

Judie was not a duchess. Judie exacted no privilege or standing about. Judie got no thrill from Arthur's presence. Cleveland Towns could have sat down while all the women in the world entered the room or left it, but when Arthur failed to rise it meant something. He could treat a woman as an equal only by feeling contempt for her.

I knew how this vanity and supercilious hardness must distress Lena, whose most beautiful quality was the pity and love in her heart, and her wish that you might have your own soul. Her heedlessness and single-mindedness at times were nothing when you thought of that. She might, if she went on with acting and grew more absorbed, grow even more heedless and be often selfish like a prima donna. But that beautiful feeling would remain, and it would be this feeling that would give a divine quality to her

art. Her respect for the soul of the character she played would give it all its truth, and her gentle love would give it all its music.

Arthur sat sulking. He threw away his cigarette and taking out another began tapping it on the back of his hand. It was a gesture used in *The Rose Sleep* by Gordon Gordon, whom Lena detested and was sick of looking at. Arthur spoke without meeting Lena's eye:

"But you can hardly expect, Eleanor, that I should admire all your friends as much as you do."

"We all know that's not it," she said.

"Oh?"

"For God's sake stop doing that!"

"Pardon me." He stopped tapping the cigarette on the back of his hand and crumpled it into an ash-tray.

"Oh, Arthur!" She came over and handed him a cigarette and held a match for him. "Why do you act like this?"

"I'm not acting any way that I know of," he said, and got up and stood leaning against the mantelpiece.

Lena sighed. "Well—" she said, in a trembling voice, and turned away to the window again.

"Sorry," I said, "but I really must run, Lena. Don't seem to be any use."

"I can't say I blame you for going," she said.

"Then good-by."

She put her hand on my shoulder. "Hal, you're looking white. You wouldn't tell us if you were dying. Don't kill yourself reading silly college themes. It's spring."

"All right, I won't," I said. "Good-by——"

"See you soon, Lafe."

"Oh, yes," I said.

"Good-by," Arthur said in a low voice, as if we had all managed to wrong him.

I had never had so strong a feeling as I did then that Arthur would not do. For all his rare traits, he simply would not do. And I felt too, as I sat down in my own armchair and propped my head in my hands, that Lena herself knew she ought to give him up but that she would not do it. They had never been more in love than now.

CHAPTER XXIX

IT was late in May that Dexter Woon's exhibition came off. I went the second day and was sorry to see that instead of progressing or coming to his full strength as he might well have done at forty-three, he showed many signs of disintegration. The number of paintings was unusually small, not a dozen, which would not have mattered if they had amounted to more. They were not even in any style of his own but were the work of a man drawn uncertainly to one artist after another. I had seen in a collector's drawing-room an early landscape of Woon's—all brown, ochre and black, suggestive of Goya perhaps and Spanish realism, but grave and pathetic, finely conceived and original. But he had lost that fine quality. One of the seven or eight landscapes was in the style of Rockwell Kent, but Dexter Woon had caught only the emphatic statement of the pattern that Rockwell Kent employs; in the rest he seemed only to get lost. The other landscapes reminded you of Childe Hassam, or Friesseke perhaps. At any rate it is a style that presents nature to us as if seen in a fine spray of green soup: the figures and windows and furniture are all fuzzed up in a pretense of light, whose miracle fails to happen, and all messed up with a lisping brush-work, whose vitality is nil. There was a portrait group called *The Cousins*, Dexter Woon himself and three other men in a café, somewhat better. It had a certain friendly masculinity and mass.

In the exhibition, however, there was one lovely thing, the picture of a little boy of ten, perhaps,

standing by a stream, with an apple in his hand. The sky was a child's blue sky, blue like china or a bird's feathers, the grass was green, as green as could be, and a stream ran at his feet. He was naked. The body was light and lean, with the bones too big for the flesh that covered them; the awkward little skeleton with its promise of a man's frame and sweet with its own grace, was standing between a child's green earth and blue sky. This picture was different from the rest, painted straighter out of something.

"Poor devil!" I thought, and wondered how recent this painting was.

I decided to write him how much I liked it. A letter like that could do no harm at least. With the letter I would send him a copy of a poem by Charlotte Wilson Baker that I remembered in a book. It was called *A Little Boy's Bath*, and could have been written about his picture.

You would have thought he never would come clean,
Yet here he is, shining like a sea-shell.

O Life, thou secret-hearted, ancient Mother
Teach him the hidden paths to thy rock-fountains,
Make them plain to his feet,
And for the insult of thy deep pollutions,
The dust, and sweaty grime, and clinging foulness,
Give him to know thy laughing water courses,
And the clean brown pools
Among the rocks.

I, his mother, have jealously kept his firm, small body;
Keep thou his soul, O Life.

I copied out the poem and mailed the letter on the way to the theatre that night and thought no more about it. That was Friday. On Tuesday I was

sitting in my armchair with my pad and yellow scratch-paper, without writing a line. I was cross and grumbling. My neighbor Olaf, across the hall, had given a party the night before, with, as he said, a grand company, singers, actors, and colored people, on drinks brought by the guests. All that swilling and screeching seemed not to suit the spring and I had declined my invitation. But the party went on till dawn, with Olaf's collie running up and down the length of the apartment among the guests, barking like a farmyard. Toward morning there was a fight in the hall and afterward a huge baritone singing in German.

As I sat there Tuesday morning it all seemed to me very low and disgusting. Morning was in the world bright and clear, and there was I, not worth killing.

There was a knock and Mrs. Norton, who had just come in, went to the door. She came back to tell me the name and see if I was at home.

"It's a Mr. Woon," she whispered. "That's what he says."

Dexter Woon looked huge by the side of Nordica's round little shape.

"Good morning," he said. We shook hands. "This morning visit will surprise you. I've been on Long Island; got your letter yesterday about the painting. And I said well I'm damned if I let a letter like that come to me without doing what I want to do about it and coming to see you. I just want you to know what that letter means to me. It's not the praise, though I like flattery as well as anybody. I just want to tell you I'm just crazy about that boy."

"Who is he? Is he your son?"

"God, I wish he were. That's just it. That painting's not new—or rather I did it from a study done a long time ago, my God how long!"

His eyes filled with tears.

"Have a cigarette," I said, and gave him a light.

"He's sixteen now. Great tall lad, tall as I am. He writes to me. He's in school at Andover. I send him there—I mean I put up the money. I know you think I'm crazy."

"Oh, no, don't be silly. It's a beautiful picture."

"Yes," he nodded.

"I liked it."

"Yes, it's a swell picture."

"So I thought I'd write you. 'Why not?' I thought."

I said, "Sure, why not?"

"That's just why I came. You're a sweet guy. I like your philosophy."

"Here, you've gone out." I lit another match for him.

"Thanks. Well, this boy is the child of an old friend of mine; we were students together in Paris. Three years. He married a model, who had this boy and died, died when he was born. My friend brought the kid to New York and three years later died. That's where I come in. I wanted to adopt that kid. But my wife objected. She said she wouldn't consent for hell. She was from Maine, a Puritan lass I married because she held out so long against me, I guess, at any rate I made a vow to marry her and marry her I did. By God, didn't I, though?" He was silent with his reflections for a minute before he went on. "So we put the kid with an old aunt of his, I gave the money. Then two years later I got a divorce—

my wife was a fine woman but I just couldn't stand it."

"And the little boy?" I said.

"Then it was too late, it would have broken the old lady's heart, I mean the aunt that had him. Well, now he'll be in college next year. He writes to me how much he loves me—calls me Guardian. My second wife hasn't any children, either. I'm just roaring on, ain't I?"

I said: "Go ahead."

"Well, I was hoping we'd have some babies. My wife was, too. But no luck. My second wife was a Quaker Jewess. That is, her father married a Quakeress from Philadelphia. She converted him to the Quakers and he converted her to a big house in Montclair, full of furniture and food."

"Jewish Quaker is a new idea," I said.

He nodded.

"I suppose it was to me. Maybe that was the trouble. Yes, my mother-in-law says thee and thou across her groaning table. They live like lords, on the fat of the land."

"It's an idea," I said.

"Well, now my wife says: 'Dexter, any time you want to marry a sensible woman I'll give you a divorce. But I won't set you free to marry any silly moron and then spend your time regretting it.'"

"But you don't want a divorce," I said; "is it just an academic point between you?"

"No. You see, I do. That's how I am. You see, I have this physical side that wants to be satisfied. And that hasn't anything to do with my real self. My wife knows that. Up to lately I've been following a blonde around. She was in the Follies till she mar-

ried a Harlem dentist. She's thankful to him for keeping her from being an old maid. Old maid, my God, as if I wouldn't have given my life to marry her! They used to show me the chorus and say 'Woon, what's the idea? There's forty right there exactly the same as the one you're so crazy about. But no, that girl had something different, that's what it was. She wouldn't have had me, I guess. Anyhow, my wife held out. Oh, she's all right, my wife's a fine woman. But the trouble with me is I just go on marrying women I don't like.'

My dear old Mrs. Norton came in with a tray, smiling her kind smile.

"Take some coffee," she said. "I says to myself he'd a right to need something to buck him up after them pests next door, drunk all night."

"Mrs. Norton thinks we need some reform in this house," I said to Dexter Woon, and introduced her to him.

Mrs. Norton turned to him.

"A couple of good murders would help. But listen, there she goes again with no brain work." She hurried out.

Dexter Woon began to walk up and down.

"And I could pour out more troubles to you. That's the kind I am."

"Go on," I said. He looked mad and his hands shook as he struck a match and began another cigarette.

"You're an old pal of hers, sort of born together, weren't you?"

"What?"

"I mean everything's changed now. I'm in love really with Eleanor Dandridge."

"Eleanor Dandridge?" I tried to control my face.

She has told me nothing about it, I thought, but I suppose Lena has no end of this sort of thing these days. Men lay siege to her, men she has never seen, some of them dreamers or lovers of her beauty, some beasts that think they may as well take their chances with this new young lady as with the chorus girls they run after at the musical shows.

"Eleanor?" I asked then.

"Yes. You're not disgusted?"

"Not disgusted, no. But——"

"Exactly. But? In this case my wife might divorce me. She can't say this was a moron."

"Hardly."

"But the trouble is I've only had two words with her. Sent her flowers five times."

"Peonies?"

"She tell you about them?"

"Saw them in her room."

"At any rate, she took them home. That makes me happy."

"It can be like a conservatory down there."

"Of course. There's a mob wanting to send her flowers, of course. Well, Kelly took me behind. I know the old fool, painted his wife. Made her look like a hell of a lady, that's what she wants. To look like a lady. Well, when Kelly presented me there were two other men who had got some one to present them. She was agreeable to all of us."

"And then?" I asked.

"She said she adored the flowers we had sent."

"She loves flowers."

"I've written her three times. Two answers. She's always engaged."

"Loves any kind of flowers," I said.

"Chronic engagement," he said.

"Especially roses and amaryllis."

"I know it's all so damned hopeless. Do you think she'd like the painting, the boy, I mean?"

"She'd love it, you know she would, but not to take it away from you."

"He and she are the two things I love. I'm just always lost, that's the trouble with me." He had tears in his eyes. "I'm that sort. Here I am, can sell as many pictures as I paint and I'm always messed up. The trouble with me is I'm just that sort. You can see what I am."

"Oh, no," I said. I got up and sat down by the window. I wanted not to see his great brutal head and his pitiful small mouth.

"You think she'd like to have it?"

I turned and saw how excited he was.

"Yes," I said. "I know she would."

"I guess there are a dozen men after her," he said, questioning me with his wretched eyes. "But the picture is different."

"Oh, absolutely."

"She already engaged? I saw her walking in Central Park with a chap."

"Yes, I think she is," I said.

"Slender, tall chap, dark hair, pale skin?"

"Yes. Arthur Lane," I said. "Kentucky."

"Oh? Southerner?"

"Yes."

"I saw them walking in Central Park. He's a beautiful chap."

"Yes."

"I'll go now. Shall I come to see you again?"

"Any time," I said.

When he was gone Mrs. Norton came in to get the cups.

"Well, Norton," I said, "that was a visit."

"I couldn't help hearing some of it from in there," she said. "Seems like to me he's not all up-stairs. When you hear anything like that you feel like you're crazy yourself."

"I do, I know."

"He's a bird, all right, that one. My mother would 'a' known how to do him, all right. First she would have handled him with kid gloves, then she would have knocked him out with a club. She always done everything so nice."

"Poor soul," I said.

"She always was sure nice around me. When she died my sister said let's bury her beside my daddy. So I says all right. When there's death you know you don't be thinking of these wrong things, so we buried her by him. Then afterward I got to thinking and I just couldn't stand it. I thought I'd go out of my head almost for that, I couldn't sleep. So I went to my dear doctor and I says, 'I can't stand it, I'm going to dig her up.' So he says, 'Oh, you'll be all right. After a little while it won't worry you.' 'No,' I says, 'I'm not going to let her stay there.' So he says, 'I'll give you an injection that will put you to sleep for a week if you don't shut up.' He adored his mother."

I sat wondering how many of such as Dexter Woon Lena was meeting these days. Men of all kinds pursuing her; people of all sorts wanting to know her.

Her natural connections in New York, considering

her family and the society she had known at home, were the people who had some sort of settled roots in life, the people who make up a certain quieter New York than is often in evidence. But if Lena stayed on in the theatre, she would know every sort. She must have begun to see this, and many things must have been going in and out of her bright head. But at this time I had little idea in fact what she was thinking. She was going here and there, busy and engaged and ripening to New York; and what went on in her thoughts was affected by that, I suppose, scattered or harried or postponed, and was shut off from me by that.

As for Arthur, there was but one way he could ever be satisfied with his New York acquaintance. If he could be a successful or famous author, hated or admired or envied by the art world and the Bohemian world, and lionized by society, he might be content. But without this easy superiority, the studio people were too casual and familiar to suit him and the social world too indifferent.

I could see that whatever happened to Lena, Arthur would make New York difficult for her.

"But, Arthur," I said, "you don't give these people any chance, like Judie or Cleveland Towns."

"Well, take your nightshirt friends, you and Lena, for all I care," he said.

"Mrs. Courtlandt, then."

"When I want gentility I'll go back South."

His face was flushed and his hands trembled with anger.

When Arthur talked like that I understood what he was feeling, and I understood what his nature put him through and how difficult life was for such as

he. But life consists of many parts, and not of one man only, and I thought that it was all very pathetic, but what Arthur needed was somebody to knock his brains out for him.

CHAPTER XXX

THE *Conte Biancamano* docked early in the morning on Saturday. The inspectors for the customs were agreeable to the first-class passengers at least, and I was in my own country again. I sent my bags and trunks on to the station and decided to walk across from the docks to the club for lunch. It was late September and the air in New York had not yet begun to shine and sparkle with autumn; it was like a dirty soup. The streets were full of old papers and here and there dried manure and peelings from bananas and oranges. People looked tired and empty. The New York that I had loved and enjoyed was not to be had this way. My New York had to be sought. I must be patient. But I did not feel like patience and, what was more, I had no inclination to do so much of the creation for myself; I had been in Italy, walking magnificent and beautiful streets, lifted up and eased and filled by them; I wanted the streets to serve me, and wanted to breathe without effort a beauty and delight. When I looked about me, I was not sorry to be going on South that afternoon.

At the Club everybody was away in the country or at home. Dudensing, the architect, was there eating vacantly as if all frayed out with boredom. He had lamb chops with potatoes and peas on his plate; the peas were canned, I noticed.

We shook hands.

"When's your vacation?" he asked. "Aren't you going away?"

"Just back from Italy."

"Really. That's New York for you."

"Well, there's a certain peace in it. You could drop out of sight a year and fit in just as well when you did turn up," I said.

"Exactly."

I asked what brought him to town.

His firm was doing an office building on the site of some Fifth Avenue mansion, he forgot what family, and he had to be in town to look after it.

"It hardly seems worth while nowadays," he said. "Everything comes right down anyhow to make way for something higher that'll pay better. The architect's as much a transient as anybody in New York nowadays and so's his building."

It didn't seem very cheerful, coming home.

I ordered my lunch, thinking of those viands from the ship's kitchen, offered by the hands of my perfect little waiter from Turin, Nerone; the club waiter's name was George, all the club waiters' names seemed to be George.

Then Kelly came in, full of oaths, and began to talk to Dudensing, who introduced me. But I meant nothing to him, he went on talking as if he had not seen me. He was very sore to have to be staying in town when his first opening was not till the middle of October. But *The Rose Sleep* was in trouble. It had seemed likely to run another year but he had been having trouble with the girl who had taken Dandridge's place. All off. He was rehearsing another for the part. It was a part any girl could act who had her share of looks. You would have said so at least before this Dandridge woman was in it. She made the character seem hard to do, she got it up in the air. But the public liked it. Why had Dandridge

dropped out? He had offered to double her salary. But money seemed not to matter. These damned aristocratic young ladies! She made him sick.

"I wish we could get Vivian Osborne or Genevieve Tobin," he said.

"But are they any good?" Dudensing asked.

"Don't care about that, they've been in good runs," Kelly said. "I wish Dandridge had stayed—could have made her a star. Was hoping she'd get thick with Gordon, that would keep her. But she's gone South. Aw, she makes me sick!"

George brought him a gin cocktail and a plate of soup.

"Got neuritis in my arm," he said; "cutting down on my lunches."

"Good idea," Dudensing said. "Is your play worth a damn?"

"It's a great American work, it ought to've got the Pulitzer Prize. Haven't you heard how swell it is? It's a swell play."

Like the good son of the theatre that he was, Kelly thought now that *The Rose Sleep* was a great play. Before the opening he spoke of it as a trifle, but after its success he began to tell every one how fine it was and to believe it himself.

"But you can't ever tell about these actors, old man."

Dudensing looked at him drily: "Well, I'd hate myself doing the same play months."

"I can't see why; success is what they want, ain't it? I said that to Dandridge, I said, 'Here you've made a swell start,' I said, 'you're a great actress.' But I'd better've saved my breath to cool my porridge. I said: 'Lissen, you can do some of those art

matinéés, that'll be a change.' What I think is she's got a sweetie."

"Southern cavalier."

"That's what I think. And hell bent for him."

I finished my coffee and went into the reading-room. The walls were hung with rather obvious celebrities. I went down-stairs and called up Judie to see if she had gotten the note I sent from Mantua a week before I sailed.

I found Judie squeezing lemons into a pitcher of iced tea.

"Well, old darling Hal!" she shouted, throwing her arms around my neck, half a lemon still in her hand. "You are back in town. But you're going right out. I went down and got this mint just for you. Everybody's still in his shop. And they've all gone on being drunk and affable every Saturday night the whole summer without fail."

Then she took her arms down from my shoulders.

"Judie, how are you?" I said.

"I'm a horse, you know it. Never die."

"You've been all right?"

"Oh, I've been slapping around all summer."

"Not the whole time?"

"Pretty much. Up in Connecticut last week. But in the summer I was always here. Thought I'd stay with Lena. We tried some trips on Sunday once or twice, but Arthur didn't like them. So we all stayed in town."

"Did Lena keep going?"

"She's a little thin but otherwise yes. And Arthur never takes any exercise anyhow, never got the habit; loves horses but they cost too much here. He never takes any exercise but he's never sick."

"When did they leave?" I asked.

"Lena went first, she left two weeks ago. He went last week. Let's see, that college starts?"

"A week from Tuesday. Monday's free so the students won't have to travel on Sunday."

"That's right. Well, naturally I forgot Clearwater's a sacred college, what with Lena and her affair going to live there."

"I'd hoped it would be over by this time," I said.

"Well it's not, not by a long sight. It's worse if anything." Judie frowned. "Don't ask me about them this summer. Honestly, I think Lena was in a trance."

"The play kept going?"

"Did it! Packed. Makes me ache to think of those mobs battenning off her soul. I guess she took her radiance there to them, or the dregs of it. I mean she couldn't help it. I say art's rotten."

"Are there still the flowers?"

"Somebody's always sending flowers and notes. She's not bringing as many flowers home. Some of them make Arthur cross, he doesn't like to find them here. She's been seeing none of these people, just Arthur. In a way I suppose it's a protection."

"In a way," I said, gloomily.

"Yes, Hal, I know what you mean. Once Lena and Arthur had a fight all right. I was in the room when it began, but you can bet Judie got out of there like a bat out of hell."

"What was the row about?" I asked.

"Lena wanted to give a party to the people in *The Rose Sleep* company. Quite right too, I'm sure they expected it. You know these theatrical parties, the warming up a little and all that. But not Arthur!"

"I imagine not."

"Not that Lena wanted to make him come. She just thought she ought to give the party. But he wouldn't see it."

"Did Lena give the party?"

"Heavens, no! And no study with Ouspenskaya. And then there was the picture Dexter Woon sent. Not my style, but lovely just the same."

"Yes, lovely."

"Well, it's in the front room there now. Arthur wouldn't let her have it."

"I'm not surprised," I said. "Judie, tell me, does Lena seem happy?"

"I say I don't know. They walked at night, they read a mountain of books aloud, and he wrote poetry. I don't know what she'd do if anything should happen."

"To Arthur?"

"Yes."

"Tell me, Judie," I said, "how did Lena feel about going? I mean giving up the theatre and then going back to Clearwater with her family."

"Especially now?"

"Yes."

"I don't imagine she mourned so much over not acting next year. After all, she had nothing but *The Rose Sleep* over and over, over and over. But, for a while there, she was knocked out by the prospect of going home. She looked worn out about it. You know what it must have been, the thought of going back, anybody'd know that."

"She never talked about it to me," I said.

"She never talked about it to me. At least I wish I felt sure he would last. If he failed her I don't know what would become of her."

"Poor darling," I said.

Judie shook her head to decline the cigarette I offered her. I lit mine and sat there smoking. Presently she raised her eyes and gave me a hard look.

"Sometimes I just detest you both—both you and Lena."

"You do?"

"I do, blamed if I don't."

"Among other reasons, why just now?" I said.

"You're so monotonous. She's so monotonous."

"I am, I know."

"Lena is. I get sick of her inside. Oh, you can't tell me, son! I know she laughs, she's bright, her eyes give you back your challenge all right. She's got wits. But back of it all don't I know there's that soul of hers?"

"She's noble, Lena is," I said. "I call her noble."

"Well, I shouldn't say she's like a man, if that's what you mean."

"Nothing to do with men. I mean she has none of that egotism that women often have and that's so curious to men, a way of turning everything into a ramification of their egos."

"Now you're tiresome as she is," Judie said.

"I may be tiresome," I said.

"I wish to God Lena'd not care about anything for a while. Just bounce around, that's what I'd like to see her do."

"With what?"

"With the rest of us. Look what a fool I am."

"Oh, let up on that, Judie," I said.

"I'm tiresome to think about but not to be with."

"Oh, Judie," I said. I had to smile.

"I am."

"Judie, darling," I asked, seriously, she looked so

tired and at sea, "what's your idea for yourself? What you going to do?"

"Well, for one thing, I've met somebody that I seem to get on with better than any men I've found; seems to last longer."

"Is that because he's weak or because he's strong?"

"I hadn't thought of it that way. I'll tell Phil what you said."

"No, that wouldn't do," I objected.

"He wouldn't mind, he's like that. As for Judie, I think she's going to Vienna."

"Are you speaking some new American I ought to understand, and missed during the summer?"

"No, I mean geography. Vienna. We'd study art."

"Is what's his name an artist?"

"Phil Hayes. No, but he ought to be. He's a young banker. Father's a rich Rotarian."

"You'll just turn Phil into an artist?"

"It's only inhibitions that prevent him."

"Well, that's what you call taking a hand in people's lives," I said. "I'd think you'd have to be pretty sure."

"Well, for crying out loud! Are you ever sure?"

It was not much of a conversation, and I said I had to call up some editors before I took the Memphis Special at six, and asked if I could see the four canvases that stood with their backs to the wall. Judie put them one by one on the easel for me to see. You might have thought, from Judie's life and from her manner of slashing around, that her painting would be strong and bold. But it was neither; she was too scattered and shaken up for that, perhaps; her wilful living was dependent on other people, after all; her crazy ways were lonely and distracted.

Her painting ended by being adventurous rather than courageous. It was not bold but casual.

The pictures I saw now were all figures in landscapes in the style of Cézanne with side issues after Matisse. They were clearly stated and full of invention, but Judie would not be able to paint them through to a finished state. It was to her credit as an artist that instead of fudging and cheating along to a certain effectiveness, by which a poorer artist would have tricked us with an effect of success, she had stopped at the point where she could not go forward.

Judie went down the stair to the door with me. She put her hands on my shoulders:

"Hal, you old sweet."

"Don't make me cry," I said. "Judie, you be happy, hear?"

"All right, I will. And you tell Lena I wish she were back in town. I wish we were all here. I wouldn't go to Vienna. There was an old fool in the Salvation Army used to say 'Under God!' That's the way I feel. I'd like to send that message to Lena. May we live days of love and happiness under God. Like a post-card. Good-by."

"Good-by, Judie," I said.

From the street I looked up at my old windows before I turned toward Hudson Street on my way to the station, and wondered when I should see New York again.

CHAPTER XXXI

NEXT day I saw the Shenandoah Valley and the mountains of Virginia, and the morning after I was in Memphis, with three hours and more to wait before the train for Clearwater. Late in the morning as it was, it would be pleasant, I thought, to go for breakfast to the Gayoso Hotel, where my grandfather used to stay when he came up to sell his cotton, and in front of which my great-grandfather used to hitch his horse. I looked about me and thought of a passage in Leonardo da Vinci's notebook: "How sweet are the people's faces in the streets."

After breakfast I walked by the river, along the high bluffs, looking across the flat lands of Arkansas and far off to the north where the Mississippi winds its course. The water was yellow like clay and sometimes on the far banks there were willows, pale green. At the river wharves two or three steamboats were drawn alongside. I looked for the *Kate Adams* to see if she was there, and wondered, as I used to wonder as a boy when my father brought me to Memphis with him, if she was the same boat I had heard of all my life and everybody in my family had always heard of, or was the name kept on from boat to boat and generation to generation, so that whatever happened there was always to be a steamboat *Kate Adams* on the Mississippi?

The *Kate Adams* was there, tied up to her landing. I found a bench on the bluff high above where she was, and sat down until it was time for my train.

By permission of the president I was a week late at Clearwater and the train that day had only farmers and townspeople instead of the crowd of students that would have been going down for the opening. The train ran along between fields of dried corn-stalks and fields of cotton, the bolls of which were not yet open, the leaves untouched as yet by the frost; sometimes there were red banks on either side the track, then gulleys, woods, and now and then a dusty road. We passed the creek bottoms where my father used to tell me the road for miles had been made out of poles or young trees laid crosswise, so that carriages and wagons of cotton bales might pass here in the wet season; and the wood where he had seen in his time acres of dead timber from the thousands of wild pigeons roosting in it. More and more passengers came aboard the train, which grew full of people laughing and talking and going up and down the aisles greeting each other. It all seemed familiar and yet far away from me.

From the car ahead a boy came looking for a seat, and asked if he might share mine. He was slender and not very tall but was muscled tight all over like a fine animal. The skin, even on his hands, was very white; and the gray eyes, though they were shy and wandering, had the maturity that comes of poetic temperament. He was too tense and all his body too taut to move as freely and lightly as a youth should at seventeen and with his build; and his whole bearing was shy for a Southern boy of his class, who has usually been taught a certain show of ease at least and an air of being at home in company. If any one had asked me I should have said that he was very restless as he sat there looking out of the window,

but the fact was he did not move; the strong white hands lay still on his lap, the neck was if anything too steady. He was not restless, then; it was something about him that suggested flight and unrest.

I was the one who started the conversation by asking what he could tell me about Clearwater, if he had been to the college or what he knew of it. He was on his way there now, to enter his first year, he said. He was a week late because his father had wished to keep him out of that first scramble and excitement over fraternities, when freshmen were received at the train and escorted about, rushed around by one fraternity and another, or tardily invited to join some less prominent group, or sometimes quite neglected and overlooked. All that seemed to his father both wrong and foolish. If later he wanted to join a fraternity and had looked around at his leisure, well and good, his father had no objection to that. His name was Eugene Oliver.

"You've written some poetry, haven't you?" I said, when we had talked a while and introduced ourselves a little more.

"Well, I don't know, I've tried some poetry." He blushed red. "Though father'd rather I didn't."

"Well, we must just get you in my class."

"Certainly must."

"All right then," I said.

Eugene and I could not talk any more because, half an hour before we were due at Clearwater, my Cousin Frank Boone came to shake hands; he had seen me from the platform a moment since, he said. I introduced my companion. Cousin Frank shook hands with him almost as cordially as he had with me.

"Mr. Oliver, I'm delighted to meet you, sir."

He turned to me.

"And, Hal, I was just wondering, as I came along, if this young gentleman would be so kind as to exchange seats with me. I'd appreciate it."

"Certainly, sir." Eugene rose at once. He and I shook hands and promised to meet soon at the college.

"Well, my boy, how are you?" Cousin Frank began. "Son, we're mighty proud of your success. You've become a great man."

"Oh, hardly that," I said, feeling rather foolish at the thought of my little sheaf of writings. "But thank you."

I did not remember Cousin Frank with any affection. He was a handsome man in the style of the third Napoleon, but dull and so proud that he was apt to take offense at anything. His pride had walked him out of one position after another, which had been offered him because people admired my cousin Esther, his wife, and felt sorry for her; and now after seven years I did not dare ask what he was doing; I only wondered at his new graces.

I had no idea how to act with him. If I put my best foot forward he was sure to spread the news that I had got the big head and was showing off; if I was modest and retiring, he would say that I had made very little of my advantages.

He struck out rather abruptly——

"Hal, do you eat much meat?"

Now that, I thought, was making conversation with a vengeance; it must be some new graciousness or policy in Cousin Frank. I could hear a dozen people how they would swallow his bait. "Well no," I

could hear one man say, and spread out into a long account of himself; and another: "Well, on the whole, yes, in my family we all . . .," and so on.

I tried to escape simply. "No," I said, "about the average amount," and waited to follow Cousin Frank.

"Son," he said then, laying his hand on my knee, "have you ever thought about taking out any insurance?"

That was it—insurance! And if ever there was a man born for insurance that man was Cousin Frank.

If I had not had the hardening of New York I would have taken insurance with his company rather than offend him. But though he made it a personal matter, my taking his advice, I held out. My ground seemed to me a sensible one: I had no family to leave insurance for. But Cousin Frank said that undoubtedly I would marry some day as every man should, and have children. He should be sorry not to see me a married man, he said. And when I still held out, he got up, shook my hand morosely, and went into the smoking-car.

What I should have said, of course, was that I was delighted to learn of his success and would be thinking over his proposal. That would have been good-class Southern. I asked myself if I was often going to be crude like that, now that I was at home again. The thought was depressing. Then I heard the whistle blown a moment later for Clearwater. Presently I could see the station and the hacks and busses drawn up that were to take travellers to the town square or their homes, and I could hear the drivers calling out and the negro porters shouting the names of their two hotels.

From the platform I saw Doctor Dandridge in his

white suit, at the far edge of the crowd, and then I caught sight of Lena standing behind him. She too was in white.

I shook hands with the doctor first and kissed him; he was like my own father.

"Well it's three years, how are you, Uncle Ab?" I said. None of the Dandrighes were kin to me, but I called them all so, and my mother had before me.

Lena kissed me.

"Lafe, we're so glad you've come at last. Father's fine, aren't you, father?"

"My heart troubles me, but people tell me I look well," Doctor Dandrigh said. The spring had gone out of his voice. In the three years since I had seen him he had become an old man.

He wanted to take my bag, but Lena caught his arm.

"No, father, now be good. Hal, we have the most dreadful time. The day I came I got my bag away from him and before we knew it he was carrying a lady's suitcase to her car."

"Well, daughter, now— It was Mrs. Pointer's, Hal, you remember your Cousin Stella."

"Of course I do," I said; "she's lovely."

"Yes. She's a beautiful woman, and she's a good woman."

We were waiting a moment to see if my trunk came off this train. I saw it at last, and Lena pointed down the station platform to Silas the yard-boy, who had been sent to take the luggage up in his spring wagon. I left the doctor and Lena while I took my bag to Silas and gave him the check for my trunk. He was a big, mild-looking boy, very black, with fine teeth. He took the check and looked up at me with a friendly grin.

"I ain't never seed you befo', Mr. Hal, but you sho is lookin' good."

I went back to my friends all smoothed out and pleased.

"Auntie said tell you she was so sorry not to meet you, Hal," Lena said. "She's staying to see that supper is all ready for you, and all that you deserve."

"How's Arthur?" I said, when we were seated in our taxi.

"He's fine," Lena answered, smiling, and I saw that she felt no embarrassment, "and likes it here. He has a class and couldn't come to the train, but he's coming to supper."

"Good," I said. "Uncle Abner, don't you think Arthur's a fine chap?"

"He's a remarkable man."

That was right, I thought; Doctor Dandridge was sure to admire Arthur. He had a sort of sixth sense when it came to vitality and natural intelligence; and, without making any sort of analysis that you could see, he scented dullness. Arthur's natural power and quickness would be sure to impress him.

"I wonder Mr. Lane didn't go into the law."

Lena took her father's arm, laughing.

"You see, Hal, father's still old-style Southern—every young man of parts must be a judge or statesman——"

"I know. And I have to laugh at how I must have disappointed Uncle Abner."

"Well, you were a mighty smart little feller," the doctor said. "Yes, sir, when you were a little feller, nine or ten, I used to say that's the brightest child I ever saw."

We talked of Clearwater as we rode along. Who

were all those people at the station? I asked. Everybody had seemed a stranger.

"You mustn't ask me, Hal; the town's full of strangers. I used to know everybody, but not now," the doctor said.

Lena said more directly that Clearwater was almost a new town compared even to what it was ten years ago. There were families here and there in town still left, but so many of the young men had gone away and people had died, and goodness knows who had come to take their place.

"Well, time brings changes," her father said, gently. "You wouldn't know most towns in this part of the country nowadays."

Lena began to tell me about the college, while her father listened to her. To him everything she said was interesting. He believed anything she told him.

I was looking at him, thinking how clean and fresh his skin was and how honest and clear his eyes. He was an able man, quick-minded and direct. But there was something easy and defenseless about him, and this, together with the high, strict standards he set for himself, stirred our affection.

CHAPTER XXXII

FRIENDSHIP, Lena's home, had been built by her great-grandfather, Alexander Backus, when he came from Virginia in the forties. It was a house set ten feet or more off the ground, with seven halls and four great porches with columns; on two of these porches, half way up, little iron balconies looked down. Inside the house the tall white ceilings were stuccoed; grapes, wreaths of wheat, flat acanthus leaves made up the designs, which varied from room to room. The high doors and windows flooded the house with light and air, and the damask curtains down-stairs and some of the woollen curtains in the bedrooms on the second floor had been there since this Backus' second wife, who was a Creole lady, re-decorated the house in the New Orleans taste. The house fronted north. To the south there had been an orchard, and to one side of the orchard and farther off, the quarters for the negroes. Beyond the garden in those days you could see from the north porch two miles of woods, where the grove was that led from the public road to the house.

But by the time Lena came along and she and I used to play among the stretches of daffodils and under the shady trees, half of all this was gone. Clear-water growing up had spread in a direction away from the Dandridges and so had left Friendship at the edge of the town. The grove was partly turned into farmland and the road passed along by the fences of the lawn; but the lawn remained, and many of the old borders were there, box hedges and

old flower beds and neglected parterres; and the mimosa tree, the clump of heaven trees by the gate, the oaks, a black gum, and a great swamp cypress still stood. The grounds had dropped from an elaborate and studied garden to a mere loved and pleasant place. Both Doctor Dandridge and his sister would have had it flourish at full tilt and in the old manner, but there was not enough money for that; and if there had been money enough there were no gardeners any more to be had in Mississippi.

Miss Bessie came over the lawn to meet us. She put her arms around my neck and kissed me, and kept my hand in hers as we walked along. She knew I would be thinking of the last time I had been at home, when my mother died, three years before.

"You are to stay with us, Hal," she said to me as she led me to the foot of the stairs, managing me already. "You won't have to hurry finding a room then, the students are so crowded now, it's not so easy. You'll have the corner room, by the magnolia. You know where it is."

"I'll show Hal," her brother began.

She held him back gently.

"No, Brother Ab, you know you are not to climb the stairs."

"Oh, nonsense, Sis Bessie."

"Well, nonsense or not, you be good now."

"Of course I know the room," I said. I took two steps up and turned back again. "But I must have a good look at you, Cousin Bessie, how are you? Sweet as ever, that's what."

"Oh, son, not this old wreck! Tell him, Brother Ab, what a ruin he sees."

"No sir, I don't see Sis Bessie's changed a bit.

She don't weigh a hundred pounds, but she never did for that matter."

"Every man's son knows who the beauty is in this family," Miss Bessie said. "And you come by it honestly, dearest. Ann Gilbert was a lovely girl when your father married her. The Gilberts were all belles."

Her father smiled. "You've heard the remark Cousin Cornelia made about that?" he said.

"Yes, Brother Ab, they've heard what Cousin Cornelia said, and we'll starve in our tracks if we go on talking here. Cousin Cornelia says too much."

Uncle Abner went on: "On one occasion Cousin Cornelia Backus said, 'Yes,' she said, 'we Dandridges have brains and no looks, but by marriage with the Gilberts we have given tongues to roses.'"

Every one laughed but Cousin Bessie.

"Listen, honey," she said to me, "run on to your room; your supper'll be burnt up."

I plunged through a bath and hurried down-stairs. Arthur had come in, and they were all talking about the University and how many more students there were than last year. He was glad that I had come, and seemed quite at home at Friendship and much like the rest of us. I was interested to see how Arthur got on with Lena's father. He and Uncle Abner appeared to have established a masculine sort of relationship, like two men who are on a hunting party together, not very personal but affable.

On the way to supper Lena sent me to shake hands with Aunt Callie, who was waiting on the back porch to see me.

"I'm sho' proud you come back, Mr. Hal," she said.

"I'm proud to be back, Aunt Callie," I said. This proud business was our old game with her.

"I'm sho' proud you'se proud, Mr. Hal. You mus' be starved after travellin' such a piece."

"The train's a rotten place to eat, Aunt Callie."

"Aw, I done told you. Ain't it de trufe?"

Aunt Callie's face looked easy and quiet. Her face, Uncle Abner's, Cousin Bessie's, everybody's face that I had seen, looked quiet to me after New York.

On the porch later Uncle Abner could not keep awake but sat on politely.

"Well," he said, "I reckon New York's a big place now with a vengeance. Haven't seen it since the Centennial, when we all went to Philadelphia and New York. We stayed in the old Fifth Avenue Hotel; they said that was the hotel then. It's gone now, I reckon, oh, yes, gone long ago. Well, daughter, did you like New York?"

While Lena was answering he fell asleep.

Under the pretext that I wanted to visit my old hunting-grounds, I got up and went indoors. The talk would go on like that for hours. It was gentle, lovable human exchange, meant to please—certainly a civilized intention—among people who loved each other—certainly a sweet, desirable end in life. It was amiable Southern family talk, and I did not mind it; I had grown up with it. And Arthur and Lena had grown up with it, they were Southerners too. But Lena and Arthur were here for a year . . .

I was walking around the parlor, standing first in front of one thing and then in front of another, a portrait, a vase, an album, the rosewood piano with mother-of-pearl keys and flowers in mother-of-pearl across the music rack. I was doing like that because, I

suppose, I had said I was coming in to look around and see if everything was the same. But I found suddenly that my hands were clenched; my finger-nails hurt the palms. The picture of Arthur and Lena sitting there like that . . .

Lena had not talked to me, those last months I was in New York, of what was in her thoughts. I had only Judie's remark to go on, about Lena's troubled mind when the time drew near for her to leave for home. She may have sat alone often enough, trying to think things out, and have shed tears often enough alone at night, wondering what would come of all this with Arthur; but she would have asked nothing. And I could not ask her. If I had, I knew what would have happened. She would have been gentle and quiet and inaccessible. Pride, love, loyalty, obliviousness. She would have said, "But, Lafe, it would look as if I didn't trust him."

Even at that, such a relationship, so long as they were in New York, could go on indefinitely. But what they could intend to do here in Clearwater was beyond me. Well, then, perhaps, Lena was thinking now that it would be only a year after all, nine or ten months in fact, and, if Arthur wanted so much to be in Clearwater, they could manage somehow to get through the time. She was a simple nature, however rich and intense, and abandoned herself to life as if she were giving herself to a dream; but she was honest and straightforward. What did she expect, then, to come of the deception she would have to practise with her father and her aunt, the lies and humiliating concealment? Perhaps she thought that she and Arthur could, if it were necessary, solve that, for the time being, by leaving off this secret part of their

relationship and becoming like ordinary lovers, a couple engaged to be married.

As to Arthur's side of it I had given up trying to think that out at all.

I was sick with dread of the year ahead.

I went out by the side hall, walked the length of the garden, and had been absent far too long by the time I came up the steps again to the porch.

Uncle Abner greeted me, still making conversation:

"Well, son, you star-gazing? Sit down."

"I've not seen so many stars since I was in Italy," I said.

"Well, now, Hal, tell us what's the difference between a European city, like Rome say, and one of our American cities."

"Daughter, what did you say your play was about?"

Every little while between naps he made these little attempts at conversation. A nine o'clock he rose and said good-night, and Lena went to tuck him in.

"He's fallen asleep like a child, Auntee," she said when she came back.

"He goes to bed really at half-past eight. Brother Abner's gotten very weak. But his heart seems to be better. It's a long time since he's had one of his numb spells. His feet get cold as ice, as if they were dead. No wonder it scares him."

"How white his skin is."

"Brother Ab always had that white skin. Mother had. White as wax."

"Arthur," I said, "how long have you been here? I've been here three or four hours and I'm sitting up as big as if I'd never been away."

"Two weeks," he said. "And Lena three, haven't you, Lena?"

"Yes, three. Auntee, it doesn't seem three weeks."

"Well, I hope we'll have you all for many months to come."

"You will very likely," Lena said. She was sitting beside Cousin Bessie on the wicker seat, and took her hand and kissed it.

It was toward the end of September and the nights were still warm and the flowers were blossoming still. The smell of red roses came to us on the soft wind as we sat there, and of the petunias on either side the steps. I wanted to hear one of the old stories that I used to listen to as we sat like this on the porch after supper, how many years ago! I asked Cousin Bessie to tell about her father and the time he came home at the close of the war and was killed. Her mother was standing on the porch, there at that end where Arthur was sitting now, when he rode up. He was on his horse, and when he started to dismount, his pistol caught on the saddle somewhere and went off, and shot him through the heart. The little Testament in his pocket was stained with blood, and all her life till her death her mother had kept it under her pillow. They found it there after she died.

Cousin Bessie told the story again now, as I had often heard her do, taking her time and putting in things her mother had told her. And I could see Lena, her eyes wide like a child's, keeping still to listen.

I was thinking, as I looked at Lena, of that face above the parlor mantel, Lena's grandmother, Georgia Backus, a face like a rose, light and sweet like a

child's; and of what life had dealt out to her. There was another picture of her in a daguerreotype upstairs, years older, drawn with trouble and pain, but quiet, and in the eyes still that strange heritage of innocence.

Then we heard the town clock striking ten, far off beyond the trees. Arthur rose and said good-night, and Lena walked along with him to the gate.

"Tell me, honey," Cousin Bessie said when they were out of ear-shot, "was Lena so good on the stage as they said she was, I mean those writers in the papers?"

"She had something beautiful," I said, "as she has now. On the stage too."

"I'm glad, then."

"The thing is, Lena's just got so much more sense than the rest of them."

"The actresses?"

"Yes, ma'am. Just so much more sense."

"Yes, I think she has."

"Of course she has," I said.

"And, Hal, I always thought Lena could write too. If she tried."

So it was with Miss Bessie, if she loved you, bless her heart! In the dusk I smiled to myself.

Lena and Arthur had paused and were standing together at the gate, then Lena started back toward the house alone.

"Listen, dear, are Lena and Mr. Lane engaged, do you think?"

"I don't honestly know, Cousin Bessie."

"But in love?"

"Oh, I'm sure of that."

"He seems very much a gentleman, very well born. Brother Abner says of course he's heard of his family in Kentucky. Near Danville."

"And very gifted."

"He's promised to let me read some of his poetry."

"Some of it's very fine, you'll see," I said.

"Will he be a fine poet?"

"That I don't know."

"I don't know how people live on a professor's salary. But they do, I reckon. I'd think it better for Lena than that horrid theatre, Hal."

"Does Uncle Ab like Arthur?"

"You know how Brother Ab likes anybody that's well-bred and has some——"

"Animation, and blood in his head."

"Yes, I was going to say vivacity. It's dulness he can't bear. Brother Ab just has a nose for where there's life."

The three of us kissed one another good-night, Cousin Bessie went in to see how the covers were on her brother's bed, and Lena followed her.

I waited for Lena to lock the hall door, and then went up-stairs to my room.

For a long time I did not go to bed but stood at my window looking out. The stars were sown thick and I could hear the leaves of the trees moving in the wind now and then like sighing.

Now that Arthur was no longer in sight I had forgotten the worry that harassed me an hour ago in the parlor, and had my own thoughts to ponder. His and Lena's being here at Friendship together like that seemed very simple and natural till you thought about it.

Then a feeling came over me of what a man's own soil means to him and to be among his own people. I put out my hands and rested them on the window-frame to keep them from trembling.

I wondered how much I had forgotten, being so long away, and listened to hear what trees had different sounds in the wind and what birds night cries.

CHAPTER XXXIII

EVERYTHING at Clearwater University depended on the president's permission. He was a little plump housekeeping sort of man with red hair, who had progressed from dean to the head of the university. His methods were those of an aggressive matron softened somewhat by the greater assurance possible to the male in our society. He had no interests beyond the management of the university. Intellectually he was as empty as the trustees, who were made up of such alumni as might have become judges, bankers, and clergymen, and whose conception of their relation to the university was largely political, a matter of what professors should be voted in and out and what departments given money. It made the running of the institution a simple issue and seemed to serve very well.

For a room on the campus, since there was nothing very suitable left in the town, I had to see the president personally. He was kindly disposed to me. I was one of his old boys, as he put it; and I had preferred Clearwater to the great Eastern institutions. He made me a long speech on loyalty and the ideals of manhood, which was doubtless one of his set pieces, for it rolled off his tongue like honey and gold. Listening to him you could not have believed that he could be nasty with his political enemies, which is how he thought of any one that opposed him, or could be maligned by evil tongues, which is how he described people who knew too much about his past. The president's history was marred by unfair dismissals among his faculty, and by various ma-

nœuvres with funds and committees that honest gentlemen like Doctor Dandridge thought shady and common.

"Room?" he said. "Why certainly, sir. Certainly, my boy. You don't mean to tell me you've been shelterless all this time? Mrs. Doyle and I would have been honored to have you as our guest."

"I stayed with the Dandridges," I said, "but you are very kind, sir."

"Oh, that's right; I believe I heard so."

Of course you have, I thought, what you miss your wife hears. You've got eyes like a rascally Roman senator in those busts on the Capitoline, Cicero's crowd of worthies.

"Then you were well provided for, you couldn't have been in better hands. Let's see, a room? Miss Kirkland—" his secretary came to the door, a pale, assured young woman with her brown hair not yet bobbed but in a knot on top of her head. She had a thick nail on her index finger like a hazel nut. "Miss Kirkland, now Professor Boardman requires a room. What have we for him?"

"There's the room in the Chemistry Building, but it's small."

"Oh, no, too small," he said, "what about the Lyceum Wing? We must make you comfortable, my boy."

Miss Kirkland came back presently and turned to me and smiled. "The room is free, all right," she said.

It was not a smile at all but a joyless affair accomplished by raising her mouth at the sides, an uplift smile, like one of those welfare-workers who think they look pre-Raphaelite.

The large room in the wing that President Doyle's administration had added to the old Lyceum building was assigned to me graciously, there was to be no charge for rent; and next day I settled into it. It was a large room opening into a hall, next door was a shower-bath, and next to that another room, where lived a Mr. Gorham, who had been a Methodist preacher and was now taking the law course. From my east windows I could see the campus buildings among the trees and the students passing. To the south lay rolling woodlands, beyond which rose, two or three hundred feet above the tree line, a hill called Farley's Mountain.

In north Mississippi the autumn is marvellous indeed; it begins faintly in September, reaches slowly the height of its colors, declines as slowly from that height, and runs beyond November. I used to see the trees from my windows when I woke, and watched the season pass. I watched the world through its bright scarlet and gold above the blue haze everywhere, on the sedge, the cotton fields, the lawns and pastures, and saw it turn to brown and wine color. I used to see the sun set over the low, open hills to the west, and the night skies grow clearer and deeper, thick with stars, sharp golden stars like points of fire. The lotus leaves in the pond turned brown and dried, and closed up, leaving the seed-pods, big as saucers, and the tall stalks in the water like reeds. Among them I could see the sky reflected, the moon when there was one, and even the brighter stars.

It was a pleasant, easy life. I had twelve hours a week in the classroom, four courses, one for seniors in literature, one for second-year men, and two classes in a foolish composition course for freshmen.

Arthur had three of these freshman courses and a second-year course like mine in literature. There was a certain amount of conferences with students, going over their themes with them, as in every college, and neither more nor less fatuous. The students in general were like students everywhere; there were those who had worked to get the money for college and whose attitude was at least laborious, others who had some degree of taste for learning, or science, or arts or raw information, and others who came because their parents had sent them. At Clearwater they were a good-natured lot and well mannered; only a barren heart could have been cold to them.

"Well, what do you think of it?" Arthur said to me. He took his meals at the hotel and lived in the house of a widow whose son had moved to Memphis and left a vacant room. "I'm not uncomfortable."

"Fair enough," I said. "And a man ought to find time to write. The work's not——"

"Contraceptive."

"Exactly. No reason not to write."

"But it's spread out and watered pretty thin, or is it?" he said. "All right for thwarted parenthood, but that's not my style."

"Not nursing the young?"

"Exactly, Hal. And look, Hal, I seem to have detected a sort of implied invitation to take a Sunday-school class. Have you?"

"Oh, yes, I know it's rather expected."

"And what church, for God's sake?"

"You're supposed to have at least inherited some preference, Methodist, Episcopal, Baptist, Presbyterian."

"Imagine!" Arthur laughed. "And you said?"

"Passed the hint by. The last time I went to Sunday-school, don't I remember it! I was a Freshman here. The teacher was a young bookkeeper from a dry-goods store. 'And so,' he said, 'we know from the Bible that Solomon was the first mason. He built the temple.' I can hear him say it now. He was the tenor in the choir. But I dare say there are better teachers, however, not so simple."

"You mean a professor must be fair-minded."

"Quite," I said, "a professor must be fair. That's part of being an example." He was smiling gaily and I laughed too. "Sure, we must be an example."

"Of what?"

"Well—of professors," I said.

Arthur seemed very happy as time went on. He saw Lena at Friendship every day, or four or five times a week at least, sometimes at supper or for Sunday dinner, but oftener in the evening. In the perfect weather that lasted through December they took long walks along the roads or across the fields. There were no people and no stage interests to be jealous of. He spoke of Lena naturally and easily, as if they had been married or were some Clearwater couple whose engagement had been announced. Once or twice I thought that Arthur was warding off some remark he fancied I was about to make on the subject.

For a while, two months perhaps, Lena seemed happier than I had ever seen her. She seemed blest and carried along by love within her; you would have said not that her body contained her soul, but that her soul enveloped her body. Then, as time passed, I thought she was worried and less happy. She used to be tender with her father and Cousin

Bessie as if they were mere children, and I used to see her looking at them with something in her eyes that it hurt me to see. But, when I was present at least, she showed none of this to Arthur. In his presence she kept up more of an appearance of spirits and talk than she had done in the past. She wore her prettiest gowns for him and took more pains to be beautiful. It was not necessary, all this, for Arthur was absorbed with his passion for her; if he ever seemed not to be it was because his pride resented so complete a surrender; and if he seemed occupied with other things, with the life in the college or his courses, it was because, without knowing it, he wanted to ease himself with something else or to fill the time when he was not with her.

But Lena looked at him as if to say:

"Love me, I'm all yours now. I've nothing else. If you left me I'd be lost."

To her family she seemed to be saying: "Dear, sweet father, dear little aunt, I'm farther from you than you think."

She got a gesture of passing her hand across her eyes as if they were tired. I used to see her look up sometimes, when Arthur came into the room, and study with a glance his whole figure; and I knew she was comparing him as he was, now that she saw him again, with the image of him in her thoughts.

I saw these things but I felt that I had no right to see them; I went to Friendship less than I had ever done in my life, and would have stayed away even oftener if there had been any way to do it.

I kept hoping that Lena would talk to me and say what was in her mind. I was sure that Arthur had never yet proposed that they should marry; Lena

would have told me of that, whatever their decision was. She must be waiting, I decided, till this year in Clearwater was up and then settle with Arthur what they would do. "She must be marking time," I said to myself.

But meantime here in the provinces Lena had not the busy days that New York had provided to distract her; and she had not the distraction and independence that her acting had provided. There were only the round of days, the garden, her family, and a few kin and friends. You can have that in the provinces like Clearwater, and that is a great deal. But it turns you in on yourself. You fall or rise at your own cost.

I used to walk about thinking it over, wishing I could help Lena. But you cannot live for other people, and I cursed myself for being a fool.

CHAPTER XXXIV

EUGENE OLIVER, the boy I had met on the train, had not fallen into any of my classes after all—he was in one of Arthur's—but we were friends; he used to come to see me sometimes or we took walks together. All young people know subtle things, though they may be silent about them; and Eugene had already seen this case of the city and the country.

He said to me one day on a walk: "I'd think a city would be a rest sometimes, honest to God I do."

"Why?"

"Well, yesterday I was walking past the Observatory and on in East Wood. About sundown. I couldn't stand that, so I came back. It was getting dusk, what they call gloaming, 'in the gloaming, O my darling' stuff. But by my window there was a thrush kept singing—honestly it was awful."

"I know," I said.

"I'd think in the city it would be easier sometimes, I mean if you had something to forget, or live through."

"In the city you can get your living done for you, if you want, you can go out and buy life or rush around and scatter it. Such living as that would be. But here it turns you in on yourself," I said, quoting my thoughts about Lena. "You fall or rise at your own cost."

"If you were a damn fool," he said, "you'd be asking me what a young chap like me has to forget."

"Oh, no, I'm not that stupid," I said. But I was

wondering what he was troubling over, he was too pale.

"I know you're not," Eugene replied, "that's why the fellows like you, they know you're not an old greazer. They like you a damn sight better'n they do Professor Lane, the men in the classes, I mean."

"It's not proper to show it, of course," I said, "but I'm glad they do."

"Course you are, anybody is."

"But Arthur's got lots you don't find in us professors very often."

"All I know is he loves to read any poetry aloud that sounds big."

"It's something to preserve a love for any poetry when you teach," I said.

"I reckon so. But I said poetry that sounds big to read."

"Well, changing the subject," he went on, "some-time I want to ask you something. I mean what's on my mind and I've got to get over."

"All right."

"Some day soon I'll come."

I nodded my head, and we walked along without speaking. It was after sundown now and the light was moving quietly along the hills to the west. I waited before I spoke till we should be at my turning and were about to part, for I wanted what I was going to say to stay in his mind.

"Gene, perhaps it's stupid of me, but I'm a professor after all—I know a chap like you has as much to forget as anybody—but I'd think you'd have also more to remember."

"Yes, there're things," he said.

"People with great imaginations," I said, "find

youth tragic and bitter. You know why? Because their thoughts and desires dilate into regions that they wear themselves out and exhaust themselves trying to reach."

CHAPTER XXXV

THAT year there were pear-trees blooming in November and roses into Christmas. But New Year's brought changed weather. It rained every day for a while, and then for those last days in February subsided into gray, with a bright sun and clear sky now and then.

One Saturday afternoon, when the sky was blue and bright and the rain forgotten after three days of light, Lena and Arthur and I went on a walk to Farley's Mountain. I tried to stay behind, so as not to be the third, who would turn the company into a crowd. But Lena begged me to come, to keep from troubling Miss Bessie, perhaps, as much as anything.

Farley's Mountain was really only a hill of a few hundred feet, but if you have the sense of microcosms, of small forms that contain the essence of vaster things, this is as good as a mountain almost, or at any rate it will serve. We crossed a cornfield at the foot and took the longest path to the top, through post-oaks and hack-berries and tangled vines that were like jungles and wildernesses, until we came to the top and saw the spires of Clearwater, the town clock in the court-house cupola and the water-tank, all looking very peaceful through the blowing gale around us. Below us we saw last year's cotton fields and there were fields of old sedge, long and turned into waves by the wind. It was golden yellow or pale ochre near by, and violet as it spread away over the rolling slopes. We could see the clay road red as the tiles of a roof. What evergreens there were, turned gray and blue in the distance, beyond the soft fields;

there was the site of a farmhouse, and trails of birds drifting in the blue air.

We ate the lunch that we had brought, very light after a dinner at Friendship, and sat for a while talking.

"Look, Arthur, tell me, has there been anything here for you?" I said, giving him and Lena cigarettes. "Has there been anything for you in Clearwater?"

"Well, present company," he said, lighting our cigarettes for us.

"Thanks for everything," Lena said to him.

"Does the college interest you at all?" I asked. I really wanted to know.

"I've rocked along, I suppose."

"Just that?"

"Not such rocking—floating! You drift here."

"Like a poorish sort of nap," I said.

"You need only a tenth of your wits to do the job, and have only a tenth enough nerves to do it."

"It gets your nerves," I said, "this professing."

"Lena, how was college in your time here?" Arthur asked.

She laughed. "The professors were all asleep."

"But you were not," he said, smiling. I felt again, as if I had never heard it before, his low, proud, exciting voice.

"Maybe I was, I almost think I was."

"Curled up in a rose."

"Yes," she said. "It all seems like some music you remember without remembering the tune any more."

"Well, look at me," Arthur said, "I'm right in it and even now I don't seem to remember anything about it."

"That's grand," I said.

We began to talk about the students, who, Arthur maintained, teetered along, with only a little cramming at times for quizzes, and then it was coffee and Coca Cola did the work.

"Are other colleges better?" Lena asked.

"They're all rotten."

"Plainly in a sad way, then," I said.

"All was dark
In the ark,
Not a spark,
Just God's fun."

We all laughed at the Browning parody. Arthur quoted one of Swinburne's: "Could God's rod bruise God's Jews?" and then we began to quote serious poems, till Lena came to a poem called *Sophocles* by Florence Taber Holt:

"I will make of old age a splendour,
So that men who have never lived
Will kneel to me and ask the gift of life."

It was a beautiful poem. I could see that Arthur tried to seem occupied with fooling about, lighting another cigarette and all, but his eyes were excited.

We stopped talking and sat there smoking, the three of us, and could see the smoke drifting around toward the south ledge of the hilltop instead of rising. After a while Lena turned to me, smiling.

"What's in your thoughts, Lafe?"

"I'm afraid nothing," I said. "What's in Arthur's?"

"I'm thinking it's at least a good talk we've had, more like New York, when there were just the three of us. I'm not created for family life," he said.

That was a rotten thing to say, but Lena made no reply. She only looked at him with her sad, gentle eyes and smiled. But she threw away her cigarette. I saw her look at the cigarette where it lay smouldering on the ground and then put it out with her heel, as if to champion somehow the thing Arthur attacked.

Presently she rose and went to the ledge of rock along the brow of the hill and stood looking off.

In that figure of Lena, slender and quiet against the late dusk of the sky, was contained the centre of a mystery. As I looked at her and the scene around, I was thinking how, for all he knows of it, the universe is only a man's soul.

"We'd better be starting," I said, and called to her: "Honey, we'd better be starting."

She came back to us.

"The stars are coming out," she said.

We went down on the other side of the hill, cutting through the woods to the public road. The sun had set, the trees seemed higher overhead, the early stars were out, and the shining darkness filled the wood. I dropped behind, a hundred feet perhaps, not much, and let them go along together.

Nobody, so far, had said anything to me that was curious or insinuating about Lena's relation to Arthur. Aunt Genie, who, as Mrs. Norton would have said, had her trap always open, professed a strong desire one day to know what Lena would do about her acting if she married a man living in Clearwater, and when I seemed to know nothing of importance to say to that, she wondered if any woman could resist the young Professor Lane if he laid his heart at her feet—she did not mention Doctor Fernandez as a Clearwater anchor for Lena; he was for her own

daughter, she hoped. Certainly, she said, she would have followed Professor Lane to the end of the world when she was a young girl, if he'd come dancing after her or so much as crooked his finger. She would have abandoned her reputation for a charmer like that.

But Aunt Genie was full of rash and desperate immorality for her youth, though the soul of prudence for her maturity. Save for boring her husband a good deal, she was a model wife, but to hear her talk she was always about to embark on a wild past.

I could only hope that this was all people said, but had to remember that I passed as one of Lena's family and would be slow to hear the talk, if there was any.

I listened to the whippoorwills in the wood, and the silence around their voices. You could wander here in this narrow wood on the edge of town, I thought, and be as solitary as a forest.

Then I heard all at once the sound of voices in the wood, men's voices, and I saw Lena stop to listen. Then I heard no one, only the light stirring in the leaves. But a little farther on, where there was a drop in the slope, the sounds came again; and presently I saw figures approaching, a group of four or five, and saw that they were some of the college students returning from an excursion.

As they came nearer to Lena and Arthur they left off talking, and saluted politely as Arthur greeted them. But as they passed, one of them turned and said, in a tone that was too free—it was impudent in fact:

"How are you, Professor, out for a walk?"

"Yes," I heard Arthur say, but in an unnatural tone. "Fine night, isn't it?"

The students went on, but I heard subdued laughter among them and one or two tones of protest, as they passed out of ear-shot. Lena waited for me to catch up.

"Lafe, who was that boy?"

"I didn't see him well," I said; "don't think I know him, anyhow."

"Do you know, Arthur?"

"I didn't recognize him, nor the voice. But I know some of them. I could find out, I imagine. But why?"

"Because she thinks he was fresh," I said. "Isn't that it, Lena?"

She nodded, and I could see she was grateful to me for understanding. But Arthur had understood well enough. For the rest of the walk he said nothing, but walked sullenly along.

I had promised Miss Bessie to be at Friendship next morning, for the first Sunday in Lent, and so would see Lena then. Five minutes from Friendship, where Willow Street cut across our road, I left Arthur and Lena together and went partly by the road and partly under the campus trees to my room. I had forgotten to open the window, the room was hot and close, and the sound of the town clock striking sounded far off and muffled. It was an old, wheezy clock, and struck nine, interminably.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THOSE first days of spring, when the damp cold begins to relax into spells of warm dampness, had brought Aunt Callie down with lumbago, and the best Miss Bessie had been able to find was a young negro woman named Lena Brook, who lived in one of the cabins back of the garden fence.

Miss Bessie had told me about her. "How you open dis dooh?" she said, every time she went to the sideboard. She could not learn how to open it, or how to tell the difference between a saucer and plate, if you asked for either. She could not remember whether it was the green or the white part of celery that you ate; sometimes she put one, sometimes the other, on the table, though she did learn after a few days not to throw away the rest of it in case it should be asked for. But she was all there was to be had.

I was early at Friendship. Uncle Abner was sitting in the hickory armchair, watching the squirrels in the trees and the chickens walking about eating the dried grass seeds on the lawn.

"Well, sir, that chicken's here every day at this time. Watch him, son."

"The same one, Uncle Ab?" I asked.

"Same one. Look at him. Look at him."

"Busy, isn't he?"

"Watch him raise his head."

He turned to me. "I like anything that's alive."

I looked at him as he sat there, saying no more but watching the chicken. An old man hating to depart.

Lena came out to join us. She leaned down and kissed her father's brow.

"I came down-stairs to find Auntie already having to get breakfast," she said. "I begged her to wait and let Lena do it when she does come—what if we do have to wait?—but you might as well be talking to the wind."

"Well, now," her father said, not thinking of the trouble for Miss Bessie, "I think I could manage my breakfast, I always wake up with an appetite."

"Then you'll soon be happy," Lena said, as if talking to a child. "Auntie's in the dining-room now. Silas is helping her put things on."

"You young people must have enjoyed your tramp last night. What time d'you get back?"

I was about to answer, when I saw Lena look at me and then as quickly turn away. She had not answered.

"I thought I heard you coming up-stairs long after midnight, daughter."

"You did, father."

"I should think you'd be tired, walking so long. I never could like walking just for walking."

"But not all that time. We got back by nine, didn't we, Hal?"

"Yes, just," I said.

"Nine o'clock?"

"Hal and Arthur went home, but I just sat on out in the hammock a while."

Her father gave her a glance, only for a moment. She did not look at him.

"Well, I don't want to hear of your doing it again."

My heart was sick for Lena. I saw her trying to let the incident, her father's tone and her own lie, pass, trying to forget it. She made that gesture of

passing her hand over her eyes. And then by good chance came the sound of the screen door squeaking in the dining-room. Lena Brook had come. The three of us stopped to hear what Miss Bessie would say.

"Lena, what do you mean by coming so late as this? It's going on nine o'clock, and Silas and I have had to do everything."

"Well, if you goin' talk to me that a'way I might as well go on back home again, I reckon," we heard Lena answer.

"No, you'd better stay. You can at least wash up the dishes. Get your apron on, Lena, breakfast is ready. And Lena, what was all that screaming down there at the cabins last night?"

"I don' know'm. I don' know whether it was my brother chokin' me or a lady havin' a baby."

It was a fine pair of alternatives for a spinster to choose from.

Miss Bessie chose the more decorous. "What was your brother choking you about?"

"'Cause I said his house was cleaner since I come to live wid him."

"Well, I don't blame him for choking you."

I turned to Lena: "Well, Lena——"

"Pa'is, Kentucky, or Pa'is, France?" she said.

That was one of our old bits. It came from the story about the woman who, when some one said, "Well, he ought to be educated, he was three years in Paris," asked, "Pa'is, Kentucky, or Pa'is, France?"

I said: "Lena Dandridge, I mean."

"Me? Then, what?"

"I was only going to say you have a fine name-sake."

"Yes, it quite confuses us, doesn't it, father? Lena

in the parlor counting out her money, Lena in the kitchen, eating bread and honey."

At that moment Miss Bessie came and took us in to breakfast. We sat down and, hungrier for the waiting, Uncle Abner kept saying, as he helped himself again, that he was eating too much for his good. Miss Bessie was telling us about a wedding that Lena Brook had graced, a few nights before, in which the bride and groom were followed by the maids-of-honor, two girls twelve years old, carrying lighted lamps and chewing gum.

After breakfast Uncle Ab went to lie down for a while, and Lena and I sat out on the porch. It could have been late April for the sun that shone around us, and we could hear holiday voices here and there along the roads, happy and bright. We sat there talking, Lena doing most of it, and mostly about her father. I had noticed how much she spoke of him lately, and always in that tone of a mother describing a child, all the little ways, trifles, dear traits. I thought I understood why she should want to talk so of him. His father had died at seventy-five. "And if you will look into the matter," he said, "you'll see that men usually die at about the age their parents did."

But it was not only because of this that Lena had her father so often in her mind. It was also because there was now a wall between them. She loved him, but the dominant portion in her life had become what he would never be able to understand. There was no need to try to make him see her case; it would be trouble thrown away. And so she dwelt on him, all his dear loved little facts, as if in the knowledge that she would lose him before long, and that in another way she had lost him already.

"I expect he's still up early in the morning?" I said, to help the subject on.

The question made her smile. "Oh, earlier than ever," she said. "And still slams about. He still lights the fire and reads the paper, and, now he's older, a chapter in the Bible, any chapter so far as I can tell. Do you know what he said the other day, Lafe, talking about the country people around about, who are as poor as Job's turkey? He said: 'No wonder they've got nothing, lolling around in bed till five o'clock in the morning!'"

Lena sat talking about her father's liking for good food, about his taste for pepper, black pepper not white, and for butter in cooking. He could digest anything so long as it was rich, she said. I sat there with a cigarette and let her go on talking.

"He's never smoked, and when I was nine he gave up drinking coffee till I was grown, because he didn't want to forbid my having coffee when I saw him drinking it. You'd think I could give up anything for him then, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, no, that depends," I said, trying to ignore the look that had come into her eyes and the sad, gentle tone in her voice. I began to talk of other things. But I was glad when Miss Bessie and her brother joined us.

People began to pass on their way to Sunday-school or church.

"Isn't that Cousin Genie's Lucia?" Uncle Abner asked.

His sister followed the passing couple with her eyes. "Yes, brother Ab, and Camillus Floyd with her."

"Do you reckon there's anything in that?"

"Oh, Lawsie, if brother Ab sees two young people together just once he thinks it's a romance. He always was like that."

"Well, now you watch. He'll marry her, Sis Bessie, sure's you're born."

"Bosh!"

"Why not? She's a sweet girl."

"That's not the point."

"And he's a clever young fellow, they say."

"Oh, brother Ab, he's common as pig tracks, and his father was before him, and you know it."

"Well, people can't help that."

"Well, then, what did I say?"

But I noticed that Uncle Abner said nothing about Lena and Arthur. At first, a week or so after Lena came home, he had made little jokes about them—"Well, I was asked for information to-day about certain people, met Joe Holmes up-town, he and Genie had been wondering. But I said, 'Joe, I don't know any more about it 'n you do,' I said. 'No, siree,' I said."

Lena had only blushed and smiled and Miss Bessie said: "Oh, shucks, brother Ab!" After a little these jokes stopped; he said nothing more on the subject. He could be tactless and thick-skinned about other people, but not where Lena was concerned.

That was before the rest of us; between themselves he and his sister must have talked Lena's case over in a very different manner.

I could see that he still thought Arthur a very likely young man who, with his brains and go, should have been a lawyer. As for what Arthur was about, his poetry and his fooling around teaching literature, Uncle Ab was all at sea.

Neither Uncle Abner nor his sister knew anything about the theatre. But she had seen the magazine pictures of actresses, and most of them she thought looked pretty shoddy, for all their fine dresses, which looked shoddy too when you came to think of it. I had a notion that she would have liked Lena to make up her mind and marry somebody, so that she would settle down and forget the stage.

That this somebody should be Arthur was quite another matter. She had not said it in so many words, but she was coming to dislike him. I knew she resented his high-handedness, the way he took things for granted. She used to watch Lena when Arthur entered the room and used to notice the tension and sweet, dark joy that came over her at the sight of him. Miss Bessie felt a woman's jealousy against the male assurance of him. She was one of those women, unmarried, who resent the privileges accorded to men and the easy road the world makes for them. She thought of women as the burden-bearers in life, and grew indignant that they were expected to have children and suffer, or to depend on men for their happiness. She herself was the soul of self-sacrifice and would have cut her head off to spare any one she loved. But, in these reflections on women that she made, she had never thought that things done through love can turn what would be a burden into what is an expression of the deepest self. To that she would have said: "Yes, but why expect women to do all the loving?" This sentiment made no sense with her own devoted little soul, but it released the resentments stored up in her and expressed her ructions at the order of the world.

Arthur, though he was courteous enough, without

much real consideration of Miss Bessie, showed at every turn his preference for Uncle Abner.

One day, when we were tying up the yellow jasmine to its frame, Miss Bessie said:

"Lena, I'd think, would make up her mind whom she loves and marry him. It's plain somebody will marry her. All the men seem bound and determined on that, dead set the way men can be."

"Well, who is it now, Cousin Bessie?"

"There's always a new one."

"And Lena hasn't much sense of humor about it all. If she'd laugh at one of them once in a while, you'd see the difference," I said.

"Now that's a pretty idea, laughing at a man because he loves you."

"All right," I said, smiling at her changing sides. "Who is it now, Cousin Bessie?"

"Well, that Camillus Floyd is the latest one, he's tried to call so often Lena had to let him come once. He brought five pounds of chocolate, like a commissary. You know I noticed he had a sort of manner with her as if he thought Lena was fast. A sort of look in his eye. I noticed it in that young man. Fast! Now what could give him that idea? Nobody could be gossiping about Lena."

"No," I said, not looking at Cousin Bessie.

"Though Aunt Gene'd scratch the child's eyes out if she took Mr. Floyd away from her Lucia, my Lord!"

"Yes," I said, "she would."

"That sweet boy Eugene, what's his name?——"

"Oliver."

"Yes—I forget everything—well, he's been several times—I think he likes Lena too much—you

know how a boy is. And then for the drop of an eyelid Doctor Fernandez would be at her feet——”

“Fine chap,” I said.

Miss Bessie smiled. “And Dean Withers has been rolling his eyes at us.”

I thought of Dean Withers as a lover. He was Kansas born of a Rhode Island family. He had good teeth, no forehead, an insinuating, smug manner, and a dry, level voice. He was one of the humble proud, a snob and a penitent at the same time. Choosing a wife was a hard case for him, even at thirty-six. He would want a young lady whose style and originality would do his taste credit and could not have borne it if the best people had not approved of her; but at the same time he wanted to feel himself superior to her.

“Well,” I said to Miss Bessie, “if it comes down to that, I vote for Doctor Fernandez. At any rate, Doctor Fernandez is handsomer than the little dean.”

“Well, Arthur’s handsome enough, for that matter,” she said, in a tone that implied if looks are all you ask for.

CHAPTER XXXVII

EUGENE came back to see me sooner than I had expected. I was looking at him as he sat talking there in the armchair near the window. He was seventeen and was all confused with the life rising in him, all lost in his thoughts and desires, bewildered, hurt, exalted. He was in a world that he could not understand but could not get used to. Older men get used to it or blind to it; what made this boy so tragic and so pure was that he could do neither. In old men passion can be a mere local appetite, deliberately satisfied and brutally separate from the rest of life. But in a young boy like Eugene passion can go all through him. It asks all because it lives in all the parts and faculties of his body and is a part of his soul; they complete themselves only through passion; and it completes itself through them, and takes on the force of divinity and innocence.

Life is the mother of us all—if she could only have taken this boy in her arms, I thought, and shielded him and rested him! But that must be later; she was still giving birth, in him, to what he must live by and so come to his own perfection.

“I am only thirty,” I thought, “but already I would gladly take his place for him, if I could only help him and could know the things he knows.”

But knowing these things perhaps could not go with having them. Knowing them was a part of something that came later, and then you no longer had these things within you to know. “Only time is our friend,” I thought, “to give us peace.”

I thought of a sentence that I had heard my mother quote when I was a boy: "Every heart hath its own sorrows."

My mother had known that all she could do was to love me and to tell me whatever beautiful, wise things she remembered, for me to go on.

Eugene sat smoking a cigarette and talking in a low tone.

"I just feel so alone. I'm so alone all the time."

"Gene, everybody is," I said.

"I'm so—oh well, that's not unusual, as you say, I guess."

"Well, I suppose we could begin at the bottom and say you don't get enough sleep. You need more sleep. And smoking—how much do you smoke? I know I smoke my fool head off."

"All the time—lately."

"I don't imagine that helps any, it's a depressant."

"It's supposed to be soothing, I thought, the damn stuff," he said.

"For old Tyrolese gentlemen with beards, and hardy stock like that."

He smiled, and I went on:

"Well, that's that. Don't think I'm such an idiot as to think these physical explanations are all the cheese. It's just that they're easy to talk about, that's all."

"Sure."

"You'll have to try to think of what the great poets have felt. I mean you're less lonely knowing them and what they said sometimes."

"I've thought of that. Been reading Shakespeare's *Sonnets*."

"That's the trick."

"I just read around, I've always read a lot. Father says I read too much. Maybe I do. We've got a lot of books at home. My grandfather was a writer; he used to publish treatises, but he fought a duel with some statesman and got killed, though that was because he was drunk."

"Is there some particular thing that's troubling you, Gene?" I said.

"Yes, got something to confess."

"Not some of your crimes. Since we got starting going modern, everybody is more than willing to confess."

"Why not?"

"Well, I fancy these same up-to-date people who rush to confession have more beautiful, warm things inside them that they don't confess than the black things they do."

"Well, this is not a crime."

"Something troubling you so?"

"Yes, there is. I'm in love."

"In love?"

"You'll think I'm a damn fool. I know the data, adolescence and all. I know all about the younger generation; to hell with it! I wish to Christ I'd never heard of their younger generation!"

"It's all bosh," I agreed, "so far's anything important goes."

"Isn't it enough to make you laugh! She's so much older than I am, and isn't she engaged to that Professor Lane?"

"Eleanor Dandridge?" I exclaimed. "You mean you're in love with Lena, Gene?"

"You're surprised?"

"No, I'm not, when I come to think of it."

"I've been seeing her now and then, I mean a little visit now and then, and sometimes meet her by chance. I just think about her all the time."

I had not thought of Eugene's falling in love with Lena. She had told me of his first visit, after he had met her in the college library with Arthur, how he came one afternoon and brought along with him his scrapbook to show her. It was nearly all poetry, with paragraphs of prose pasted into it now and then; and he had shown her one thing after another, staying twice as long as he should. "You're the first anybody at all I ever read these to," he said. "I don't know why I do now, seems funny." Lena caught his head between her hands and kissed his brow. "You darling!" she said. She might have known better than to do that, I suppose.

I knew nothing to say. A boy like that at seventeen has wonderful things in him, and you have to be careful. A touch may bring death. For these things of his must be perfections, complete, shining. These ideals cannot bear imperfection or chance fact or disillusion; and how should I know what his soul asks of desire?

I just said, "Gene, your mother isn't living, is she?"

"No. She died when I was a little boy, nine."

He went to the window and stood looking out.

"I've walked a lot down the road by the orchard near her house, kind of late in the evening. It doesn't do any harm, does it?"

"No, not if it helps you."

"I sort o' like it, the sandy road, and the trees, it's such an old orchard."

"Then why not?"

"It ought to be different, somehow; when you have so much love to give, I don't see why all life couldn't be love. I don't see why men take life on the grounds they do, not by a damn sight! I mean why they accept it."

He was picking up his hat to say good-by; and I saw that his hand was shaking.

"But they do, so there we are," I said.

"You're a good scout, Hal."

"Try some sleep."

"All right, I vote for sleep. I'll try it. My eyelids come down, but I'm not asleep behind them."

"You try it anyhow."

"All right."

From my window I watched him going down the campus walk. His movement was curiously certain, full of wayward directness. At seventeen he was grown up, not into a man but into himself, complete in himself like an animal. He was headlong and set, but he was tender and lonely like a child.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE Dandrighes had set a day for the annual spring visit to their Uncle Prout's, and since it was Saturday, when I had no classes, I was to go with them. The visit was social, a family event, but its purpose every year concerned Uncle Prout's trip to Carolina; for twenty years he had escaped the Mississippi heat by summering in Asheville. Lena's Uncle Prout was Major Proudfit Gordon Irby, a resounding enough name, certainly.

The Irbys lived nine miles south of town on their place, The Cedars. It had once been a plantation but there were now only thirty acres or so, mortgaged to the hilt and rented out to a negro family on shares. The rest had been all mortgaged and then sold long ago to meet Uncle Prout's needs as a gentleman. He had never done anything but read and travel and talk with his friends, not since the Civil War, when he had been a young private in Forrest's Cavalry—the Major was a title by courtesy after the war. He was the doctor's cousin, the son of his mother's half-sister, Molly, who married a Tennessee Proudfit. At eighty-two he had outlived all his brothers and sisters and four out of five of his own children. His only child now, Bogue, named for her mother's family in Georgia, kept house for him, with the help of old Aunt Hannah, who was a part of the family past. They were supported by the kin. Aunt Genie gave something and sometimes another cousin or two, but most of the money, which had not to be very much after all, was given by Doctor Dandridge and Miss

Bessie. A little by way of chickens, ham, and vegetables came from his farm, but nothing else.

Penniless or not, good year on the farm or bad, Uncle Prout never stayed at home in the summer. It never occurred to him to omit the trip to this mountain resort to which he attributed his health and even his long life. Various people in the family or among Clearwater friends had seen him from time to time in his Asheville haunts, where he sat about on the porches and talked Southern gentleman of the old school, and described at length his family place, which he pictured as a Southern plantation in the grand tradition.

Gradually, however, the contributors to Uncle Prout's comfort had come to feel that this gentility of his ought to exist at its own expense for a while. This year even Miss Bessie said she thought the Dandridge family had given their share now and more; somebody else could pay for Uncle Prout's trip or he could stay at home this summer like the rest of us; The Cedars was a cool house, there was always a breeze in the up-stairs hall. But there had been much discussion of this question at Friendship and from it such a picture of Uncle Prout had emerged as a lonely, erratic great gentleman, a quaint, fantastic old aristocrat in a crass, material world, that Lena's imagination was stirred. She announced that she was going to provide for Uncle Prout's summer, and none of our arguments could dissuade her.

"Let him have a good time," she said. "I've all that money from last year."

On the way out to The Cedars that afternoon we were all happy in the spring around us everywhere. The rain of the night had left the air sharp and

fresh and the soft gray clouds along the hills gave a gentle pastoral note to the day.

Doctor Dandridge was telling me about Major Irby.

"You don't know, very likely, that since you left, Uncle Prout nearly got married. Yes, sir, that's what he did, he nearly got married. Didn't he, Sis Bessie?"

"Tell him about the lady, Brother Ab. It was dreadful, yes, honey!"

Doctor Dandridge began to tell about a widow from Indiana that Uncle Prout had got engaged to in Asheville the summer before. He had told her about the Irbys and the house.

"And you know Prout and Bogue both think that because it's an Irby house The Cedars is the finest house in the world. He thinks even the soil is better than anywhere round. Uncle Prout will tell you, not in so many words, that the land on his side the fence is better 'n that on the other side. He forgets that that was his too, till he let it go."

"It's true," Miss Bessie said.

"Well, he talked and talked about the old Irby house, how fine it was. He told her it was on the King's Highway, the old main road between New Orleans and Memphis, told her about the trees. But the Indiana widow woman evidently decided she'd come see for herself. The first sign of disillusion she showed was when they turned off the main road. 'Why, Prout,' says she, 'where's this go?' 'To The Cedars,' he said. 'Why, Prout, I thought you told me you were on the King's Highway.' The match never came off."

Miss Bessie turned to me: "Hal, you've seen Uncle Prout?"

"Yes, but long ago, Cousin Bessie."

"He looks about the same. He and his sister, Aunt Sarah, I must say, used to look like people when they came riding into town."

Uncle Abner smiled, as if he were talking about children:

"In our old buggy, with Joe Holmes's horse, about twenty years old."

You might have expected the Irby place to be a low, rambling house, with vines and walks, and with contentment and old-fashioned peace lingering about; a place filled with the logic of order and rest, a house white painted, that breathed out cleanliness like a falling shower. But what you saw when you drew near was a square house gray and weathered; around it there were a few cedar-trees, but no lot, no garden, and no wall or fence; only a gateway with posts remained. There was an old brick smoke-house and an ice-house of logs, the roof of it fallen in. Some of the roses and box had grown up into thickets.

Uncle Prout, in his black suit, met us at the door, his daughter Bogue standing behind him. He was a distinguished-looking old man, with his tall figure and white hair. He wore a mustache and imperial, in the style of the Third Empire.

Miss Bogue was dressed in gray gingham, and was past fifty. Her father's manner was gracious and suave but hers rather dry. Life had drilled her in different things. I looked at her and thought of the schoolings she had had. From the effect she gave she might have been brought up to an education in the ancient Persian style, to draw the bow and tell the truth.

They did not seat us on the porch, where there

were benches and a chair or two, but took us into the parlor, the windows of which must have just been opened for our visit. What paper still hung on the walls was gray, with panels and columns on it, like that in the drawing-room at Friendship, a worn Brussels carpet was on the floor. Over the mantel was the portrait of a beautiful lady with a camellia at her breast and pink rosebuds in her brown hair—Miss Bogue's mother, she told me. Even in love fortune had favored Uncle Prout.

"Bo," her father said, when we were seated, "some of our wine might be acceptable, don't you think? Eleanor would like some Scuppernong wine, wouldn't you, my dear?"

"There," he said, when the sponge cakes and wine were brought, "I fancy you've had no wine in New York like that."

"Indeed not, Uncle Prout," Lena said.

He began to inquire graciously about Lena's visit to New York and to compliment her on her success. He was under the impression that it was the opera she had followed.

"My daughter Bo and I rejoiced at your triumphs," he said. "But while we rejoice at your success we regret your departure."

"Thank you so much, Uncle Prout," Lena smiled happily.

"The only grand opera I ever saw was Patti. That was in Cincinnati. Cousin Bessie and your mother went; there was a special train from Memphis. Do you remember, Cousin Bessie?"

"I should say I do, Uncle Prout. I burst a new pair of gloves applauding. That was *La Sonnambula*. Wasn't she lovely! Like a little partridge."

He turned to me, while his daughter waited for him to speak.

"And you are in the University, I believe. I trust you find it pleasant coming home again. You must come again to see us. We Irbys stay on right here, don't we, Bo? Like our trees."

Miss Bogue smiled with her drab lips.

"We couldn't blame you in this sweet old house," Lena said.

"Yes, the Irbys stick together. We don't increase by scattering over the earth. Science tells us, does it not, that multiplication by division is characteristic of the lowest forms of animal life."

I thought that a neat remark of Uncle Prout's, but he made nothing more of it; he plainly never made any more of anything.

The conversation went on half an hour more till Miss Bessie said we must be going if we meant to be home before dusk; the spring rains had made the roads hard sledding in places.

"I'm told the highroad is deplorable," Uncle Prout replied. "I have not been over it for some time. But our own drive seems in excellent condition, I believe."

"Except—" Miss Bessie was about to mention the uninterrupted mud half-way from the main road to the house, but she refrained. "Yes, Uncle Prout, quite good," she said.

"I think you and Bo are very smart, Uncle Prout," Lena added quickly.

"You mean——?"

"She means," Miss Bogue said bluntly, when no one was expecting to hear her voice, "that when

you're talking to idiots it don't much matter what you say."

Lena flushed—"Oh, Cousin Bo; why, Uncle Prout!"

"No matter, Cousin Lena, my daughter expresses herself like that sometimes. Her grandmother was like that."

Miss Bessie was pulling her shawl about her. "Why, of course, Bo means what she says, exactly. Let her speak her mind. Really, Brother Ab, we must be going now, pleasant though it is."

I could see that Lena was trying to keep her mind on Uncle Prout; she wanted to forget perhaps not what Miss Bogue said but what she was. To forget the barren nightmare of that gray husk of life.

"Uncle Prout," Lena asked, taking hold of the old man's arm and looking up at him, "when do you leave for your summer?"

"In June, early in June, I hope to go."

"June?"

"By then I find the heat unbearable. Though my daughter doesn't find it so—she stays here."

"This house is never hot. Or at the worst that hall up-stairs is always cool," his daughter said, quietly.

"Yes, early in June. I don't know my exact date. I've not made my arrangements with the bank yet."

Lena's voice sank to a low, caressing tone.

"Let me give you the trip, Uncle Prout, I've some money I made last winter, I'd love to do it. Will you?"

"You're very kind, my dear, but I should be depriving you, I fear."

"Oh, no, really."

“Very well, then, if it gives you any pleasure. I appreciate it.”

He seemed to take that as the end of the matter, and nothing further was said on the subject. Miss Bogue put the sponge-cakes that were left into a box for Uncle Abner.

CHAPTER XXXIX

NEITHER Doctor Dandridge nor his sister had said much during our call at The Cedars. Uncle Prout had taken over the conversation. But as soon as we were in the automobile and started, they began to talk about the rack and ruin to be seen everywhere, and to recall the days when the Irbys were busy spending the last cent of what the war had left them, and the garden and house had been very different from what they were now.

I saw that Lena allowed the others to do the talking and sat looking out over the country, on which the setting sun cast its warm light. Did this arid visit to the Irbys' house make her feel starved and balked, as it did me? Did it oppress her and drive her back toward the perilous hot core of life? Did the sight of that faded Bogue Irby, with her flat breasts and dry skin, sicken her with its ashes and mockery?

Finally Miss Bessie leaned over across the doctor's knees and patted Lena's hand:

"Baby Girl's as quiet as a little mouse. Did you enjoy our call?"

Lena smiled and nodded, and afterward passed her hand slowly across her eyes.

"Uncle Prout certainly is a gentleman of the old school," Miss Bessie said.

"Perfect," Lena said.

The doctor chuckled.

"Well, Bogue's nobody's pretty child now, Sis Bessie."

Lena turned away.

"Let's not talk about her, Auntee. It's ghastly, it's too ghastly," she said.

"But I don't think Bogue's so ghastly, if somebody'd dress her," Miss Bessie said cheerfully.

As we drew nearer home where there was richer soil, the grass by the road was taller and more lush, you could have lain down in it and be hidden completely. Soon the road began to follow the orchard fence. Then the chimneys of Friendship came in sight. I saw them with joy as if I had been away a long time.

It was just that moment after sundown when long shafts of light are sifted through the trees and everything is gilded with a splendor almost unearthly. Now, as we went, we saw the rails of the old fence shining against the undergrowth that crowded within them, like bars of gold across a shadowy field. Lanes of light slanted down the orchard depths, and lay in warm, drowsy avenues along the ground. It seemed indeed the haunt of ancient peace.

When we came to the stile that let from the orchard onto the road, Lena asked Silas to stop the car and gave Miss Bessie her hat to carry.

"Auntee, you won't mind, I know, if I leave you all. I'd like to go through the orchard, walk there a little. It's so lovely."

"No, darling," Miss Bessie said, "but wait till Silas stops. And is it safe there? You're not even in sight of the house. You used to see all under the trees but the mock-oranges have grown so fast."

"What could hurt me?" Lena said.

"I'm worried about Lena," Uncle Abner said, as

we drove on again. "Seems to me she and Arthur could have reached some sort of conclusion by now."

Miss Bessie shook her head, with a frown, and put a finger to her lips as she looked at Silas, and then went back to the conversation about the Irbys.

A little farther on we met Eugene Oliver coming our way. Miss Bessie called to him:

"Can we give you a lift, Mr. Oliver? Wait, Silas."

The car slowed up.

"No, Miss Dandridge, thank you. I'm just out on a little walk, the day's so fine," Eugene said, taking off his hat.

"Don't let the boogers get you," Uncle Abner said. "All right, Silas."

"Hello, Gene," I said, as we started.

"Hello, Hal."

"Does this light suit you?"

He saluted, smiling back as he moved on.

"Eugene told us," Miss Bessie said to me, "he wished he were in your literature class, Hal, instead of Arthur Lane's."

Uncle Abner said: "When I was in college there wasn't any English Literature—I remember the Gallic War—*Gallia omnia est divisa in partes tres*—but you don't pronounce it that way these days."

"I wish we'd asked him to supper with us, Brother Ab," his sister said. "I see him pass nearly every day, walking down here."

"This new way I don't recognize one word in a hundred."

"Lena says Eugene's a darling boy," his sister said.

At the gate I bade them good night, and turned toward home.

The idea of supper seemed intolerable. I went

around the side of the campus farthest from the mess-hall and on out to the field west of the University. A low hill or slope ran north and south and rose gently in a long clear line against the sky. There were no trees and the grass was close-cropped by the cattle at pasture. I walked the full length of the ridge, with my hands clasped behind my back, watching the night draw on and marking where, all across the fields and the neighboring wood, the light quivered into stillness.

After a while I descended the slope a little way below the crest of it, and walked its length again, following a path the cattle had made there.

Other thoughts had followed on those of the afternoon and the ride home. I was lonely for what the country could not give me. I felt a cry for the town. The city—and New York was the only city in America for me—seemed the only place to live. For I wanted to hear music, and any music I might hear in Clearwater would be radio specialties or on the Victrola, or played by young ladies. But I wanted at that moment to hear Gluck's music. I thought of that song of Orpheus', wandering the Elysian fields, calling the lost Eurydice. There were no words for that final beauty and pain; there was nothing to take the place of that music.

It would have seemed now that this hour here could have done that for me. The evening star hung over the sad land, from which the light had passed on into the sky and gone. The stars would soon be rising in the east, the stars in the west would shine. But now there was only the one star, searching along the shadowed fields. The paths shone faintly, there was not a sound. The evening star moved farther

down the west, where the setting sun goes and the dead.

If all the stars were there and all the lonely dead——

Why could not this give me that elegy and beauty that I wanted, then? But it was not the same and could not take the music's place.

CHAPTER XL

I OPENED my door full of my own thoughts and reached vaguely for the switch. The light fell on Eugene sitting at my work-table. His face was white. He started to get up but dropped into his chair again.

"Gene!" I said.

"What time is it? I've been waiting," he said.

"It's nine o'clock or after."

"I've been waiting. I looked through the window of the mess-hall to see if you were at supper, but I didn't see."

"I wasn't there."

"Have you been at the Dandridges?"

"No. Walking. Why? What's the matter, Gene?"

"I came to tell you something. I mean I meant to tell you. But now I know I can't. I'd be just a cad, I can't be just a dirty dog."

"No, tell me."

He suddenly put his head down on his arms and began to cry.

"No, look, Gene," I said, trying to lift his face up; "tell me. It can't be so bad. You're all in, that's it."

"No, it's just that I can't bear it."

"Here, I'll lose my job for it, but take a drink; I'll give you some whiskey."

He shook his head. "I don't want a drink."

"Then tell me, Old Top."

I sat down on the table and put my hand on his head. He stopped crying after a while.

"Go on, smoke a cigarette," I said.

He took one of mine and lit it.

"Look, Hal, I've got to tell you. You've been such a friend. And if I don't tell you, you'll never understand," he said.

"Understand what?"

"Why, I just couldn't bear it. I just can't go on living now."

"Don't start that, Gene. You're upset. The killing yourself you've got from all the newspaper stuff about college-student suicides. Don't you think so? They've played up college-suicide till it's got to be a commonplace."

"I don't see how death could be that, Hal," he said.

"No, but doing it could be!"

"I reckon so."

"Go on and tell me," I said.

"I don't know what causes they may have had," he said, "the other chaps."

He had been walking along that road by the orchard at Friendship, as I knew; I'd met him. It was late, supper time; he thought he would not go to supper, he could get a sandwich later at the Greek's. He was walking along and then he saw Lena going across the orchard through the trees. He stopped, not wanting to scare her, he just stood there by an apple-tree that grew in the rail fence. Then he saw her stop and thought she had seen him too. But just then he saw a man get up from where he had been lying under a tree and start toward her. It was Arthur Lane. He could see she was surprised and startled. She had kept very still when Arthur threw his arms about her and kissed her and kissed her. Eugene could see her face.

"Hal, she looked sad and lost," he said.

"But, Gene, they are lovers," I said. "We knew that already."

"I know, I know."

"You didn't have to see what you saw to find out they were lovers."

"Oh, hell, I know that! I knew they were in love—I mean I thought they were going to marry. But I didn't know that—you see I stayed on."

"You mean you stayed on!"

"Yes, how could I leave, they'd see me? and then—it's an awful thing to do to her, my seeing her like that."

I got up and went to the window, with my back to him. I couldn't look him in the eyes.

He went on: "It's just rotten, that's what."

"Oh, no, you're not to blame," I said, still without looking at him.

"No. But it's rotten to treat her so, just the same."

"Well, that's life," I said.

"But what have they done to me now!"

I knew nothing I could say. I turned back and stood beside his chair.

"I just can't bear it. I couldn't ever believe anything again."

"Don't shake your head like that," I said; "it does no good. It only makes it worse."

He stopped shaking his head and sat quite still.

He sat too still. "Look, Eugene," I said, seeing him like that I had to say it. "I hope I'm not a cad but I'd better tell you something. You say what have they done to you, but it's what have they done to themselves. I happen to know that they had broken off this part of their relationship. I mean the——"

A blush spread over his face, and he nodded his head impatiently. "I understand."

"For as long as they were here in Clearwater. And you can see why. Any one could see the humiliation of it here, for them. And love ought to be able to stand such a strain. I mean if it's love of any importance, or at least we could theorize that way, though there's no telling, really, about it. Anyhow, they made this resolution. So I suppose a lot either stood or fell by this, for Lena and Arthur. And now for one cause and another they broke down. So you see how it must be. Don't cry, Gene, we can't do anything about it."

"I'm so sorry for her. I'm just so sorry for her."

I waited a long time before I spoke.

"Why not try to get away for a while? We could manage with the dean. You'd make up the time you lose all right, in your college work."

"Not much to make up if you've got any brains."

He poured out the whiskey and drank it.

"I can well believe that," I said.

"I suppose I ought to go now. No use keeping you up all night."

"No, stay, I'll read to you," I said; "you won't be sleeping. Sit down."

He sat down.

"What is there to read?"

"If we believe in great art, now's the time to show it. To bring it into life."

"All right, I'll stay."

The thought came to me how all things, even those of the physical world outside us, lie in a man's soul, even space. With Eugene like this I seemed, through what I saw in him, to have gone to some place far off, at a great distance somewhere.

As I got out the book, I could see him from the corner of my eye. The dumb, silent sympathy that we hear about was out of place here. What you needed with an excitable mind like that was to talk, read aloud, give him something to go on, keep him going.

"Here's the grand boy," I said "this Plato. And this isn't Jowett's pew of a translation, which Carlyle said was translated not into the English language but into the Christian language—how's that for a crack?"

"I don't feel like any Christian language."

"This is Shelley."

We read in the *Symposium*, half an hour it must have been. Plato is speaking of the nature of love. We came to the lines where he says that it is not merely for the sensual delights of their intercourse that lovers dedicate themselves to each other with such serious affection, "but the soul of each manifestly thirsts for, from the other, something which there are no words to describe, and divines that which it seeks, and traces obscurely the footsteps of its obscure desire."

I stopped reading and closed the book. "Well?" I said.

"You know," Eugene said, "it's funny how I know it's not just highbrow or anything that makes you read this at such a time; I mean that's got you reading Plato at such a time, when my bottom's knocked out. It's not high horse, it's just natural to you."

"Of course," I said, "but we're not bothered about me. This is your party, Old Top."

"I know. And I'm much obliged."

"Then I'll read you just one more sentence about love—it's from *The Phædrus*." The page was already turned down.

"The paths of darkness beneath the earth shall never again be trodden by those who have so much as set their foot on the heavenward road, but walking hand in hand they shall live a bright and blessed life, and when they recover their wings, recover them together for their love's sake."

Eugene listened, leaning forward and stretching his eyes. Then he frowned.

"Yes, but the hell of it is that's for the next world. What I can't stand is this."

"But there's a certain impoliteness in abruptly leaving the world where people are."

He laughed. "You're a good old devil, Hal, being funny for my sake."

"I'm a good old devil, being funny; but you're not telling me at all what you're thinking," I said.

"Well, just then I was thinking, is Arthur Lane's poetry any good?"

"You've read it; you know it's good."

"But I can't make it go with to-night in the orchard. I just can't."

"Well," I tried to explain, "the way I see life is that it's made up of the literal detail, brutal, exact, whatever you want to call it—reality. Life's made up of this exact reality, but it's also made up of exaltation; that's our immortal reality."

"Our exaltation is our immortal reality?" he said.

"Yes."

"I know that's what you think."

He got up and stood at the window with his back to me.

"We have to take life all together; not in parts," I said.

"I just can't. Not now, not any more, can't you see?"

"In a few days you can," I said.

He turned and reached for his hat.

"Well, at least I needn't kill you out. I'll go to bed. I'll write you from home, maybe."

"You're going home, then?"

"It's funny, I feel different, I mean home seems different just now from what it ever did to me. I'd like to crawl in there, just have it between me—you know."

"And life."

"Yes."

"Then why don't you go?" I said.

"I'll try a visit home, a week or two. I know what Hartridge would say if I'd tell him."

"Your brother?"

"Hartridge thinks he can say anything because he's three years older and in dad's bank."

"What'd he say?"

"He says that's what you get for living in the clouds."

"Well, what's he got any better?" I said.

"Hartridge would say that's what you get for your God-damned virginity. I don't reckon many of the lads around college are virgins, Hal."

"Well, their problem isn't yours, Gene," I said.

"Good-by, Hal. And thanks."

"Good night, Old Top."

"But I'll have some more whiskey, if you don't mind."

He poured out half a glass.

"Look," I said, "don't drink all that, you'll be drunk."

"I won't be drunk."

He emptied the glass.

"Well, all I can say is, you're a pretty good boy if you can put that much down."

"I won't be drunk."

When he was gone I should rather have had him there at the table crying and cursing.

CHAPTER XLI

IN a three-room house not far down the street from Friendship on the town side lived a widow, Mrs. Maclean, whose son had come to visit her. He came sometime in April and stayed a long while, airing his views and opinions till the whole town would have liked to choke him. This Mr. Philip Maclean was one of the Clearwater boys, as *The Clearwater Reporter* said in its notice of his arrival, of whom we might well be proud. He was a newspaper man himself, twenty-six or seven by now, and lived in Atlanta.

I met him one day in the college library looking, as he said, to see what the young people in Mississippi these days were reading and getting a shock to see what antediluvian books were on the shelves.

He picked out one book that seemed to disgust him more than any.

"This stuff," he said. "Do you mean to tell me they feed students on this?"

"What is it?" I said. "Feeding is a strong word."

He showed me the title, *Stories of the South*.

"Well, what's the matter with that?" I said.

"Sentimental rot! Lies! Still talking about the old days and their romance, and Southern ladies and chivalry and serenades! And what astonishes me is that some of these fellows I see in this lot have been associated with liberalism always. There's John Sterne, well, I'd say for him to be keeping up this old gag is simply astounding."

All Clearwater had heard of his views, and now I

saw that Maclean considered himself a radical. He saw himself as a Southern radical. If that poor John Sterne's stories had proved that all the old-time romance was lies, the gentlemen all blackguards, and the ladies haggard women who were worked to death, or silly uneducated belles, he would have been a liberal. This would have been truth and he its prophet.

Maclean drove ahead: "The South will never get anywhere till it gets rid of this sort of mush."

"Where should the South get?" I asked, in an innocent tone. He paid no heed but went on looking savagely through his book. He was one of those people with the instinct for truth without the brains for it. I wondered what trouble he would make in Clearwater.

A student looking up something in the stacks near by was listening. It could do no harm, then, I thought, for me to say a little on the subject.

"I dare say there's a lot in what you say," I began, "but it's only natural, of course, that a people who had lost their cause and had a hard time afterward and were so poor and had their pride hurt so, and saw a thing they had been born to dying away from them in a new age, should have created a defense in some sort of beautiful tradition."

He took up his own line of thought as soon as I stopped. "If science can look every passing fact in the face, why can't literature? Convictions are prisons—but the South never heard of Nietzsche."

I offered to do anything I could about having the library order them if he would make a list of books that he thought the students ought to know. Then I changed the subject by asking him if he knew Ralph

Boyle in Atlanta; he knew him slightly, Boyle was a theorist, he said.

As I went out I saw Mr. Maclean talking to the young lady at the desk, who was blushing hotly and trying to be affable.

I might as well have stayed and mingled my blushes with hers, for after my encounter I could not keep my mind on what I read. I decided to go over to Friendship, where Miss Cornelia Backus had arrived the night before. She was a cousin of the Dandridges, like them a descendant of the Alexander Backus that had built Friendship. Before she was ten her father and mother had died, and had left the little girl to live first here and then there among the kin, and mostly at Friendship, where she had the same black mammy as Uncle Abner. Uncle Abner would have given her a home, but by the time he was of age Miss Cornelia had been teaching school five years; she had begun at sixteen.

But that was a long time ago. Since her father had been a preacher in that denomination, it was a Methodist college with which she began her career. With the education she had, there was nothing for her to do but become a Mistress of Literature or History, or both, since she knew how to read and could in either of these subjects prepare her lessons in advance and so keep abreast of her pupils. She began with eight hours a day teaching, from eight till four every day, after which, three times a week, she took the young ladies walking or chaperoned them to the shops, and on Sunday she had a Bible class. For this she was paid twenty dollars a month, with board and laundry.

Since that time when she had begun as Mistress of

Literature and History at High Ridge College in Tennessee, nearly fifty years had passed. And all that time Miss Cornelia had kept going, in spite of spells of fever and rheumatism, and had refused offers to live with this cousin or that, preferring her independence and her own money, which under our more modern conditions had risen to sixty dollars a month, with board but without laundry.

She had much still to give a college, and a president with any brains would have known that nothing could be worth more to his young ladies than the gentle breeding and delicacy that such a woman could bring. But the demand was on for up-to-date teachers, young ladies from any sort of homes who had taken a degree at the State University or studied at summer schools in the North.

The times have changed for women, of course; but, even at that, Miss Cornelia's history and the sight of her worn-out little frame at Friendship was enough to frighten Lena, or any woman, into matrimony. And now there would be only that much more strain at home for Lena. She was used to family life and all its happy and its unhappy, wearing things, but an old cousin like that, coming to live in the house with Miss Bessie, would mean something often sweet enough no doubt, the fragrance of old ways and gentle affections, but it meant also contentions, hurt feelings, the wear and tear of age and temperaments. I was sorry Cousin Cornelia had not come a year later.

Lately the new school, a Methodist Episcopal College in Oklahoma, in which she had found a place, had failed in mid-year, after paying nothing except the first month's salary. She was very wel-

come at Friendship. Uncle Abner had often said: "Cornelia, why don't you quit the fools and come on live with us?"

"Well, they wouldn't have me, Cousin Hal," she said. "And now the other place has failed."

"What do you care?" I said. "A lot of trash and riffraff and ignoramuses."

"I know you say that, honey." There were tears in her eyes.

I piled it on: "A lot of damn pious frauds, and oily dunces! And even at that they don't make enough to feed the chickens!"

"I know. As mother used to say, cousin, the pot's boiled over and the scum has come to the top."

I put my arm around her shoulders.

"You can teach us all, with those sweet gray eyes."

"It's mighty sweet of you, but I'm an old woman, and no use."

I protested, "The devil you say!"

"I suppose they did the best they could. They meant to be kind. They just didn't know any better," she said, more like herself, "and there's no use crying over spilt milk," and added, smiling as she held out the back of her hand for me to see, "thin as it is."

CHAPTER XLII

I ARRIVED one day to find Mr. Philip Maclean paying a call at Friendship. Miss Bessie and Lena were on the settee, the doctor in his armchair, and Miss Cornelia near by, her hands lying quietly in her lap, her face powdered white.

It was one of those spring days in Mississippi when the light is veiled, as if the moon shone too as well as the sun. A long, slow wind kept coming up from the south.

Mr. Maclean was sitting informally on the floor, as he would do, of course, with his knees drawn up in front of him and his back against a column. His clothes were long outworn and shoddy; you saw that he made a profession of being untidy and what he thought Bohemian. I was sure Miss Bessie was wretched to see him on the floor like that and knew she must have urged him to take a chair. To see anybody uncomfortable in her house was more than she could bear. She had not enjoyed a violinist who played once at Friendship because he had to stand. "I said, Mr. Beale, couldn't you sit down and play just as well? but he would stand," she said.

Mr. Maclean was proving for us beyond all question that to convert a fool to liberalism only means that you convert liberalism to folly. He was holding forth on the subject of men and women and the old notions about the female being pursued by the male. He had got himself heated with ideas that Bernard Shaw had worn out in the nineties, or twenty years ago at least.

His tiresome, goaty voice went on and I forgot to

hear. I might have been alone; the wind blowing in the garden made the leaves sound like waves. Then I came back to myself and heard Mr. Maclean saying:

"Don't you agree with me, doctor?" Mr. Maclean said, at last.

"Oh, there's something in it, I reckon," said Uncle Abner. As a doctor he had known many a straight fact without any violent shocks of disillusionment.

"Why, Brother Ab, you ought to be ashamed," Miss Bessie said.

"Why, what, Sis Bessie?"

"My stars, don't the women always get the worst of it? First it was Eve and the apple, and now look what the men say."

Miss Cornelia spoke up: "Well, Cousin Abner, I shouldn't be surprised at anything one of those grinning birdwomen did."

"Mr. Maclean, she means women aviators," Uncle Abner said, "don't you, Cousin Cornelia? She's fixin' to get excited over those women aviators."

"Yes. Birdwomen, that's what they call 'em. Haven't you seen their pictures in the papers?"

"I think I have. But why shouldn't women fly, Miss Cornelia?" he asked seriously. "Why isn't aviation a good profession for women?"

"Well, everybody to his own taste, as the old woman said when she kissed the cow."

When Cousin Cornelia said this, Mr. Maclean laughed; he was beginning to take us all as atmosphere.

He even went so far as to ask the ladies' permission, as he took out a package of cigarettes. "Do you mind, Miss Bessie?"

"Please do. I like the odor of tobacco. Brother Ab doesn't smoke."

He offered Lena a cigarette and she declined with a shake of her head.

"Don't you smoke?"

He asked the question so directly, looking her so straight in the eye, that Lena felt somehow obliged to answer. Before she could say anything, however, her father spoke.

"I don't suppose Lena ever smoked a cigarette in her life, did you, daughter?"

"Not often."

"What?" he said in an excited voice. "Not often? You should say never."

"Oh," said Mr. Maclean, "you young ladies are clever ones! Get her off in her corner I'll bet you she smokes like a house afire."

Lena looked embarrassed. She had never smoked before her father.

"Honest now!" Mr. Maclean persisted.

"Mr. Maclean, I wouldn't have a daughter that smoked—" Uncle Abner began. Lena interrupted him:

"Oh, father, don't be absurd."

"I wouldn't. I'd rather a daughter of mine had never been born than to have a cigarette between her lips."

"Now, father, that's saying something very hard," Lena said gently. A look of pain had come over her face. I knew it was not just the subject of cigarettes that had hit her.

"I mean what I say, Eleanor. God, we all know these days how it is. You can be sure women who smoke go on from that to drinking whiskey and from that into who knows what?"

"We'd better change the subject," Miss Bessie said. "Mr. Maclean, it must be very interesting to write a newspaper."

"Yes, change the subject," said Miss Cornelia, "do, pray. I think we'd better."

"All the same I mean what I say," Uncle Abner went on. "It's first tobacco, then whiskey, and then there's no length she can't go."

I looked at Lena and wished Mr. Maclean would continue his remarks. What Uncle Abner said was absurd, I knew that perfectly, but it was so much a part of his character and was said so strongly that I could feel his control working even on me.

If I felt Uncle Abner's influence and control, how much more would Lena feel it. He was that kind of man. You knew you would go on thinking about him. It was a kind of goodness that was exacting like nature's. You might have what theories you chose, his goodness was whole and complete with its own rightness; you might measure yourself with it but not change it.

Mr. Maclean began to describe at length the power of the press, his idea of which seemed to be that in the press you could make it hot for people. He indicated that what with the rottenness of things and the backwardness of the South, he had done a good deal of exposing.

"But there's a sweeter side of the press," I said, at length when he had finished his version of a journalist's life, "I mean the publicity game, you know how reputations are made. And then the publicity for causes. I've got a friend in New York who writes for a bureau that will do any cause. One spring it was a college-endowment fund, then a diabetes centre or

hospital for something, and some ginger-ale promotion, and last winter raising money for a cathedral."

"That's a long jump, isn't it, Hal, from the days when everybody in town brought his jewel or stone or penny, or pound of cheese, toward the glorious towers?" Lena said, smiling.

"A long jump," I said.

Miss Bessie turned to Lena suddenly: "Well, then, dearest, I reckon those pieces about you and the pictures of you were all done by these agent men? Were they?"

"Kelly has one, I don't doubt."

"But, now Lena," I said, "you ought to tell Cousin Bessie you got remarkable publicity, really; there were a lot of your pictures asked for by the papers. Partly because they were pictures of a beautiful woman. And you must admit that most of the vulgarity—I mean stories of how a Southern girl came to New York without experience and won success, and was of an old Southern family—you hadn't much of that."

"Well, I should hope not," her father broke in.

Miss Bessie frowned. "Well it all sounds mighty shoddy and common, is all I can say." She had not ideas but she had convictions and they gave her character.

Philip Maclean laughed, as if out of a vast experience: "It's a great world if you don't weaken."

After a little while he left; he was going to address the Pen Club at the University that evening, he said, and must get some notes in shape.

Miss Bessie turned to Lena: "Baby Girl, you look a little peaked to Auntee. I've been sitting here thinking you need a tonic. Brother Ab, Lena needs a tonic."

"Why, I don't see anything wrong with Lena," he said. He had forgotten his excitement about cigarettes and was looking at his daughter with loving eyes. "She's the prettiest girl in the world. Better'n a thousand dead girls, she is, yes, sir, that's what she is, better'n a thousand dead girls."

Uncle Abner went indoors to take his rest and left the three ladies with me on the porch.

"The poor thing's forgotten everybody's health but his own nowadays. It's sad, he used to be so solicitous about others," Miss Cornelia said, "didn't he, Cousin Bessie?"

"It's all part of his breakdown, Cousin Cornelia. I should think you'd know that if you'd stop to think, child."

"Of course. But I just said he was different. You needn't be provoked."

"I'm not provoked." I went over and stood by Lena, and took her hand. She was too pale.

"Honey," I said, "I wouldn't mind what Uncle Abner said about the cigarettes and so on."

"All right," she said.

"It's just talk."

"At least I wish Auntie wouldn't look at me, Lafe, as if she thought I was going into a decline."

"Now there, Lafe," Miss Bessie said, "you see the child's not well. When she's cross like that. I know this family. Every time anybody's not well they go to seeing something the matter with me. That's exactly what they do."

"Auntie, I'm sorry if I'm cross," Lena said.

"Well you may be, madam. But it's all right, precious."

"Well," Miss Cornelia said, "well now, don't you all worry each other."

"No," I said, "let's begin to nibble on Mr. Maclean, that'll cheer us."

We began to take him to pieces. I for my part meant to demolish him, if for nothing else only to get Lena's mind diverted to him and off the trouble that his babble and blather had stirred up in her family. What irony! It was as if Fate had sent this Smart Alex with his silly revolt into this house where the real thing was working. What was only professional chatter to him was life and death in this house.

When I set out on my way to supper, Lena walked to the gate with me. We said nothing till we were almost to the gate; then Lena said, without turning toward me: "Hal, did you ever find out who the boy was that was so rude? You know—when we were coming back from Farley's Mountain."

"Never thought about it again," I said, "to tell you the truth. But I could find out for you."

"It's no matter. No, Hal, don't."

"Some little fool, of course."

CHAPTER XLIII

THE last of the six attractions, as the University Lyceum course described them, was to be a concert by two New York singers. There had been three lectures, a string quartette for Chamber music, and a Shakespeare reading. After each occasion some member of the faculty gave a sort of reception, and for this last number President Doyle asked Lena if she would entertain the artists. They would feel more at home with her, he said, and think themselves more honored. Like many people in Clearwater, he was still under the impression somehow that Lena's affair in New York had been with the opera. Miss Bessie was not very enthusiastic about the reception.

"I just don't see the use," she said.

"Well, I tell Sis Bessie people like attention," her brother said.

"I imagine they'd like just to be let alone."

"Not after the hotels," I said. "Anything human after the hotels, Cousin Bessie."

Uncle Abner thought it only proper to open his house to strangers and visitors in town; that was all the tenor and the soprano meant to him.

This singer, Mary Shannon, was the daughter of a famous statesman whose name was still popular over the country though he was long since dead. I knew about her in New York, where late every spring she took a hall and gave a concert for the prestige of it. Most of the tickets were given away, but her manager needed a New York appearance as a part of her season. At twenty-five she had announced that she was going to be a singer and had

gone abroad to study. I had heard her once on a benefit program for some French war charity. She was intelligent but without the warmth to make an artist of any kind; and she had no voice to speak of, only a hard-driven mezzo with little color to it. Her career was with college bureaus of culture and under the auspices of women's clubs.

Any one might have thought that, since her fortunes hung on such provincial favors as we were able to give her, Miss Shannon would have been graciousness itself. But quite the contrary, she was all condescension, attacked her songs with the dispatch of a professor in a conservatory, and bowed, when she had to bow, like a proud princess. The applause, as it always was in Clearwater, was friendly and loud, all the louder for the embarrassment people felt at the flatness of the affair. Miss Shannon gave one encore, in German.

Friendship was on the college side of the town, not ten minutes from the Chapel where the concert had been, and the guests were all there when the singers arrived and were taken to their dressing-rooms up-stairs. I saw Miss Cornelia now over in a corner, bent a little forward, with her knees crossed and swinging her foot as of old. She had on the same party dress, the silk with broad stripes of brown and purple and narrower stripes of orange.

"You're giving me a kiss, that's very nice," she said.

I said, "The same as always."

"And here's the same old dress, I've still got my thunder-and-lightning dress, you see."

She began to talk about my father when he was a young man; he was very proud of his feet and had

a pair of boots so tight that he had to steal out on the porch once at a party and take them off a while. But he was a man for all that and a good shot; he could hit glass balls in the air with a rifle on horse-back.

It was half an hour before Miss Shannon came down. "The same mad drive," I thought. She was still after some effect that would be different from the natural cordiality of people and their pleasure in her art.

I looked at the guests as they were being presented to Miss Shannon. There were in all twenty-five or thirty of them, two or three students among them, and a dozen young ladies. None of them was very grand or famous but they were gentle, charming, and friendly, and were there to greet her. But for all her determination to sing to them, they had nothing she wanted. She met them like royalty granting an audience.

I had heard Lena greet Miss Shannon, and Miss Shannon had been gracious enough to say: "I hear you have played in New York."

Lena smiled and nodded. "Yes, a little."

"Indeed? And where? In the Guild School? I wonder is it a good school?"

"No, with Kelly. In *The Rose Sleep*."

Miss Shannon was astonished. "Really? I didn't see *The Rose Sleep*, but it had a long run, I know. And what did you play in it?"

"The gentle heroine."

"The lead? Really? Oh, you're the Southern girl I heard of?"

"I came home. I had enough of it for a while, don't you know?"

Miss Shannon lost interest. "Really!" she said. Arthur, standing by me, heard this conversation too.

"There's a breath of New York for us," he said.

"Well, let's not lay it all on New York," I said.

He saw Miss Shannon refuse, with a formal smile, the plate of chicken salad that Miss Bessie brought her.

"All right. Artists, then. And art in the Provinces," Arthur said.

"And not lay it all on the artists. She'd give her head for that New York success of Lena's, but she can't come down from her pedestal to show it. Let's send Uncle Joe over to pay his compliments."

"What's that about Uncle Joe?" the plump old lecher cried to us, coming up and putting a hand on a shoulder of each. He had stopped at somebody's house and had too many drinks.

"Eh, Hal?"

"We're plotting your ruin."

"How's that, by George! Tell me, how was the concert? I told my wife I'd come on later and join her here. Seen your Aunt Genie this evening? I said, no, ma'am, I'm no musiker, I said. I'm not a connoisseur like you, Hal."

He was one of those manly men of the older generation who cannot imagine being a connoisseur in anything unless, perhaps, it might be women.

"That won't matter," Arthur said. "If you haven't heard the concert your compliments will go all the more to her person."

Uncle Joe and his compliments had a better reception than Doctor Dandridge, whose little gallantries had been coldly accepted; sometimes when he

was excited his voice went up too high and he was not impressive.

"Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast," we heard Uncle Joe declaiming.

"She seems to like it," I said. "Perhaps it reminds her of her father, the statesman."

The Signor Severino, in whose group the doctor now was, was at the other pole from the soprano. He began by having a voice, in the first place, too white, and often too forced and loud from the influence of Caruso's Victrola records, but a high lyric tenor with a hearty street quality; he had been in the opera and his part of the concert had been sung and shouted with full operatic passion. He was a Neapolitan, plump and dark, and the sight of so many pretty girls around him was too much, they went to his head. Every now and then Miss Shannon gave a patient glance over toward the piano, where he sat singing one Neapolitan song after another, with a mound of salad in front of him waiting and sure to be eaten.

Signor Severino began on *Funiculi-funicula* and I saw Dean Withers, who had done a six weeks' tour in Italy, smiling indulgently as he recognized at least one of the airs.

Lena came our way. "He's sweet, isn't he?"

"The tenor?" Arthur said.

"Yes. He's tried to hold everybody's hand. Look at father shouting at him. Father thinks because he's foreign he's deaf."

Lena went over to her father and put her arm through his.

"Father, darling, Signor Severino hears quite well, you're thinking of some one else."

"All right, daughter," he said and began again to shout. But there was no harm done; Severino understood what was in the old man's heart. Lena and he began to talk of the opera.

"You've met the guests of honor, I suppose?" Miss Bessie asked, joining us.

I nodded. "Thank you."

"Then everybody has. This family is getting festive, I tell you! Brother Abner's birthday's just a week off. I say we oughtn't to try his party this year; Brother Ab's not strong enough for it. He ought to be quiet, he's not feeling as well lately."

"He's looking well," I said.

"His skin's clear, that's it, honey. But he's had those faint spells once or twice. Swimming in the head. It scares me, Hal. But you see how 'tis. Lena and Cornelia both say let him have it if he wants it."

"There you are," I said.

"I wish you'd look at Eleanor Dandridge; he's exerting all his fascinations on her! Oh, Hal, these Italians of yours!"

"You couldn't blame him, Cousin Bessie, with Lena in that silver," I said. "She's too much for him."

She smiled. "Arthur, how nice to see you. We haven't seen you for three or four days."

"No, it was only yesterday I planted myself on you for tea."

"One little cup, that doesn't count."

"Then I'll have two soon. Now, I'll say good night." I could see him working himself into a rage.

"But so soon?" Miss Bessie persisted. "We'll think you don't like our guests. Hal, don't you like our guests either?"

"I like your party. As for La Shannon, well, she's a terrible fool, we must admit."

"Son, she'll hear you! You don't know how your voice carries."

Arthur paid no heed.

"To tell you the truth," he said, "I detest the theatre. In any form. Anywhere."

His face was flushed, the vein stood out on his forehead.

Miss Bessie looked puzzled but smiled as she shook hands.

"Then you'll come and see just us to-morrow."

"Or very soon, thank you. Good night," he said.

"What in the world?" she turned to me when Arthur was gone.

"Arthur hates studio people," I tried to explain.

"But they've been here all the time."

"Well, then, I reckon he's jealous."

She nodded toward Severino where he stood chattering to Lena, rolling his black eyes and flashing his hands about. "Yes," I said.

"Oh, Lawsie, I declare, men are fools! I pity Lena if Arthur goes on like that often."

"Oh, I don't know," I said. "I suppose it shows at least that he cares."

"Cares? As if he deserves any credit for that! You can't tell me anything about Arthur Lane."

"Sometimes I'm sorry for him," I said.

"And sometimes I'm sorry for Lena."

"It has to be like that, I suppose," I said.

"Well, he's wearing Lena out, I know that. She's getting so she's quite cross sometimes. It's not like her. And then she's heart-broken. But I say, 'Baby Girl, Auntee knows you're just not well.'"

Miss Shannon had favored the company with only half an hour of her presence. Uncle Joe had offered to see her to the hotel and would come back for Aunt Genie. The party was breaking up. Miss Bessie was shaking hands with people in the hall. Severino was singing again, the *Pagliacci* aria, as loud as if it were the opera.

Then all of a sudden I heard Doctor Dandridge's voice near the stair:

"You got your call, all right, Dean Withers?"

"Yes, thank you," I heard the dean saying. "I did. A piece of bad news, I'm afraid. One of the boys who went home on a visit the other day. His fraternity telephoned me. Eugene Oliver. He's killed himself."

I did not hear any more or say good night, but found my hat, slipped out by the garden door and went home.

CHAPTER XLIV

IN my Sophomore course we had come to the Nineteenth Century and I had some reading in Coleridge to do one night after supper, but was so concerned about Lena that what I read meant nothing to me.

Since the news of Eugene's death two weeks before, I had been less often to Friendship. I wanted not to talk about him there; something we might say might lead Miss Bessie to mention our meeting with him in the orchard road that day we came back from Uncle Prout's, or some word or glance of mine put an idea into Lena's head, who saw so much that she never mentioned, and so much more than people thought she saw. And Lena had enough to bear already.

I put Coleridge aside and went over and stood by the window. These strong personalities, I thought—thinking, too, how stupid this stale phrase was when applied to anybody that was anybody—"these strong personalities go on all their lives, I suppose, draining other people. Having other people worry over them. Wasting people's time. Keeping me from my own proper business."

And here was I, at it again, consumed with somebody else's smoke and flame. That time in Judie's room came back to me, when we were talking about our troubles, and I said I was not supposed to be anything but a comfort to the egotists, a bosom for temperaments to weep upon. I could go on now like that till I used myself up over Lena.

But I knew that was a foolish thought. If Lena wasted me she fed me also. It was the same with life and with all that is alive, which at the same time must consume and nourish us, as fire gives both flame and ashes. What, then, if I could only wonder, and love with an old affection, and see her mystery go by?

I left my hat behind, for the spring night outside was warm and soft, and set out for Friendship. Lena and Miss Bessie were strolling slowly arm in arm up and down the walk to the gate.

"I'm making Miss Dandridge take the air," Lena said, smiling, but looking quickly away from me.

"I tell Lena Miss Dandridge has been hopping about all day. But she's like her Cousin Cornelia, if she makes up her mind you've got to do anything, you might as well do it at the start."

"But you know you like it out here, Auntee, with the heliotrope smelling so. Now don't you?"

"Of course I like heliotrope."

"You like your niece."

"Yes. I love my niece. But I wish you looked better yourself. You don't eat enough."

"Why, Auntee, you told me at supper I was eating too much."

"Well, if you did, it was false appetite."

Lena laughed. "Then what am I to do?"

"You need a tonic. If he's going to be eying you the way he does, beaming every time he sets eye on you, he might as well be doing you some good."

"Oh, Auntee!"

"He must know some good tonic."

"I feel perfect," Lena insisted.

"No, sir, I tell you I'm going to ask Doctor Fer-

nandez to give you a tonic, you and Cousin Cornelia. Listen yonder at the poor darling, she's telling Brother Ab what she's been reading in the papers. I declare Cornelia's a curiosity. She'll talk herself out of her clothes. Some lunatic up North blew up a hospital to spite the doctor. I declare I can't see why she's so set on these horrors. Hear her talk, you'd think he'd blown us all up. And she never saw the man."

We came to the porch steps.

"Lena, do you suppose Cousin Bessie'd think it proper if we took a walk?" I asked. "That's why I came by. Is it proper, Cousin Bessie?"

"Son, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Of course, take a walk, what do you mean?"

"Of course," I said; "I'd forgotten, there's no propriety any more."

"Except Cousin Genie," Lena said.

Miss Bessie was obliged to laugh, though she did not approve. She turned and gave me a little hug.

"You and Lena have learned a lot of naughtiness in your old New York."

Lena and I went down the street till we came to the campus, at the far end from the University, and followed the curving roadway through the trees. I did all the talking. Lena was silent; now and then she reached out her hand and touched one of the trees when we passed. Even in that light I could see how white she was. I thought: Life is given to the passionate souls; it goes at last where it can be contained.

I said nothing about Lena's affairs or anything nearer home, but began speaking of Duse, thinking that that life, lived with so much sweetness and pain,

might compensate itself a little even now by what it gave to another life, as it had once given from out itself in her art.

I had written a short essay about Duse which she had seen translated in an Italian newspaper, and, when she came to America for her last tour, she had invited me to her hotel to see her. We used to talk; and I tried now to tell Lena some of the things Duse had said. She had spoken of the solitary road to himself that an artist must take, how he must save himself from all cliques and circles and groups, especially in the theatre, where they meant only death to him. She had spoken of love and art, how alike they were; of how you may feel many kinds of love but never know what your love will be in each case till you feel it, of how an artist cannot know what his creation will be until it happens, as a woman does not know what sort of man the child she carries will be till he is born. I tried to convey to Lena some of the quality of this woman who took such hold on the people that saw her, and gave to me, seeing her in her own drawing-room like that, so terrible a sense of being a centre and vessel of life, and a divine and candid human soul so tortured and absorbed with itself.

It was this, I said, this torture and absorption, the completeness of this intense life, that gave Duse a beauty that no picture of her could portray, no portrait, photograph or sculpture, and that gave her when you saw her on the stage such a distinction as set her apart from every one around her, to the hurt no doubt of the dramatic unity of the scene, and laid on her that air of fragile sweetness that made you want to defend her, and that sense of solitude that broke your heart.

As we walked along I told Lena of Duse's hands, and talked of that rhythm of her speech, a way of breaking the phrase, of leaving the words where they seemed to rise in the thoughts, not stressing them in their usual order in the sentence or phrase, a strange, perilous rhythm, uncertain, plaintive, but with its own inner obstinacy and force.

By that time we had come to the far end of the campus grove, where a sand road marked the boundary of the University land. We crossed it and walked on for a quarter of a mile, perhaps, through the adjoining wood and along a ridge that on one side looked out over the open, on beyond the railroad tracks toward the west. The wood about us was no longer an open grove, with cleared ground and great trees at intervals, but all trees, close together and smaller, a slim wood with patches of undergrowth. The moonlight was beginning to come into the upper part of the trees; there was a white cloud of it, as if the world were rising upward.

Lena stood there. She listened to the silence under the slope; there was no sound beyond a little wind now and then in the near-by leaves, small gusts like waves or spray. The trees went up, high, like slender shafts, and under them lay the quiet, shadowy ground. The world seemed all stillness and yet all rhythm, a rapture of flight, and quietness. And suddenly in the open, under the boughs of a beech-tree farther on, we saw the evening star, steadfast and throbbing, it seemed to shine over the world but most on your own breast.

Lena felt the hour entering into her, and stood there with the knowledge that, some day afterward, at some moment on the stage, she would feel all her

body become this moment. The thought came to her of how much went to the creation of a single movement, a tone, even a pause; exactly as so many centuries went to the development of an organ like the eye, or so many forces, seasons, wind, rain, and so much of the chemistry of dust, went to the presence of a half light in the depths of a flower.

She could see herself at some moment in a play, her body lifted with these trees, her mind filled with this quiet and passion; and in the midst of that would come the living idea arising like the star out beyond the edge of the land there. And she could hear the words rise to their eternal place, could hear herself speak them, and, in the pause that followed before the applause began, a hush in her own soul, a waiting for the wood and the dusk there under the moon.

She wondered if art was always like this, was something out of the memory, a voice of something past, the immortal come to us out of death. She wondered if art is like the return of a soul to its old life, of a ghost to its memory.

She spoke of these thoughts to me as we went back along the road; the memory of Duse, and the night around us, had, as I hoped it would, made her forget the strain and trouble she had and filled her mind with its own proper life. We turned out across a pasture, and came home by a path through the orchard.

CHAPTER XLV

ONE day toward the end of the week I was sitting at my desk just before noon with a letter from President Doyle lying open before me, when Arthur came in. He was all elated. The morose look that I had so often seen on his face these last two months was gone.

"Hello," he said, throwing himself into the arm-chair.

"Well, Arthur, how are you?" I said.

"Fine."

"What's got you so lit up?"

"Hal, I've got to talk to you. I've got something to decide."

"You look as if you had decided it."

"I haven't. But it's tempting news."

I thought I could guess what it was, but let him tell me.

"You know the trustees met last week. To-day comes a letter from the president. First some compliments for my work this year. How's that for a good one. As if I'd done any. Then he begs to inform me that the trustees have voted me an associate professorship for next year and more salary."

"How much?"

"Thirty-five hundred. As salaries go——"

"Not bad," I said.

"And as you said, living here's dirt cheap."

"Well?"

"Don't you think I ought to take it? I mean what's there any better?"

"That depends. For teaching, yes. But for your writing, is this the place for that?"

"My writing hasn't come to much lately."

"You can't always judge. You haven't shown me anything in a long time, and I didn't like to ask."

"Why not, we're old friends, and you've endured enough of my stuff already."

"Oh, come off," I said.

"But if you want to know the truth, I haven't written a line for months, not since November."

"My God, Arthur!"

"It's the truth nevertheless. Not a blasted line."

"Do you know why?"

"I just haven't. Have you?"

"Some, not much. But I haven't got the feeling that my writing's as important. It's only essays."

He was thinking of himself and made no answer.

"I'm leaving the profession, however," I said.

"Quit teaching, you mean?"

"Absolutely," I said.

He frowned.

"When did you decide that?"

"I don't know. I reckon I knew it all the time, that must be why I was saving money. To make the break. At any rate, I know it now."

"This year?"

"Absolutely. This June."

"You've lots of spare time, teaching."

"Leisure I certainly have. But there's some sort of strain about it that's fatal. And you give so much and get so little. It's all right for thwarted parenthood as you said last fall; but I'd like my children born in art."

"Celestial progeny?"

"Yes. At least that's the way I feel now. And in

teaching I'll soon be getting empty, and then go on faking up effects. Like an old street-walker, roughing up my intellectual cheeks when the bloom is gone."

Arthur laughed. But I could see that he was unconvinced.

"Arthur," I went on, "you don't really want to settle down here, do you? In Clearwater?"

"That's what we've got to decide," he said, growing serious, almost sullen. "I'm not so sure, Hal."

I had a sort of intuition that made me ask another question:

"Arthur, was this what it was made you look so happy when you came in?"

He seemed startled, and hesitated before he said, "Yes."

"Yes?"

"Largely."

Largely? I began to wonder what was really going on in his mind.

"I can see you don't think I ought to stay."

"No," I said; "I'm just not sure."

"I can see you don't think I ought to stay," he said.

"And what about Lena?"

"As for the acting, you know what I think of acting," he said, sullenly.

I lit a cigarette and said nothing.

"Besides, Hal, if we stayed here we'd get married. You looked surprised."

I said nothing. "Well, in Clearwater," he went on, "we'd marry. Then maybe I'd see something of Lena. You've noticed how little we meet now, I know you have. And probably you know why."

"I think I could guess."

"I may as well say it. Our—our irregular relationship makes so many difficulties. So many lies and deceptions. Lena hates deceiving her father and Miss Bessie. She naturally would, that's obvious. So we tried to make our relationship—" he stopped.

"Regular," I suggested.

"Yes, like any engaged couple."

"Is it all right to ask when you made this—this resolution," I said. "I mean since you've already spoken of it."

"Why, yes. It was in February, the last of February. And now May's here. It's hell. I'm sick of it. I've felt like going to Memphis sometimes."

"Women like that wouldn't help," I said; "not a bit."

"It would pay things up."

"Pay what up?"

"Well, pay life up, we'll say." He looked at me defiantly.

"But would it?"

"The physical strain."

"But you didn't go?"

"No, I couldn't, I suppose."

"You'd marry then, staying here?"

He nodded his head.

"What does Lena think of it? You don't mind my asking?"

"No, of course not; that's why I came. I haven't told Lena yet."

"Oh, well then—" I said.

"And when I do tell her I don't want any indulgence from her. I'd rather she said straight out what she thought."

"Sure," I said.

I knew what he meant. I had noticed that Lena had often now a patience that was beginning to irritate him. It came from a kind of love that is very different from the love that is all exaction and passionate hope.

There was nothing else to say until Lena had said something. I showed Arthur my letter from the president. It informed me of a raise of five hundred in my salary, with some kind remarks about my success during the year. There was nothing about any promotion otherwise, but that would have meant a professorship, and there was no place for another professorship in Literature.

We sat discussing colleges as a place for creative work in the arts, and came to the conclusion that it was a comment on the nature of art that such a life as a writer can have in a college, with its regularity, leisure, quiet, and intellectual tone, might seem to be ideal, but is, as a matter of fact, relaxing, contraceptive, and vague.

"You know, Arthur," I said to him when he rose to leave, "I'd advise you one thing. I'd wait and take this up with Lena after the party. Her father's birthday is day after to-morrow. She's worried about him, as it is."

"I suppose you're right," he said. "I know Lena stewes about her father, but he looks very well to me."

"For the last two months he looks as if he'd taken a new lease on life. But that's not necessarily a good sign, as Cousin Bessie says."

"Oh, Miss Bessie," he said. "Let's hope to God you don't go by what she says. She's a professional raincrow."

"All the same, I'd wait," I said.

"Oh, I'll wait, Hal. But it will have to be soon afterward or Lena'd be hearing about the letter. Everybody in town knows the trustees' business."

"Yes," I said; "nothing's hidden long in these parts."

Arthur looked at me steadily for a moment. "I know," he said, as if speaking to himself.

He went away less elated than when he came.

I sat thinking of Arthur after he had gone. He had not been so much of late with Lena and he had not written much since he came to Clearwater; I wondered what he did with himself all the time, besides lounging about his room and going out always so immaculately groomed. He looked like a portrait out walking. If he stayed on in Clearwater he would come to nothing, nothing lived, nothing written, only pride, languor, self-complacency, or defensive spleen.

I had been observing for a long time that Arthur, since he was getting nowhere in his career, was already on the defensive.

He had quit reading the magazines. Seeing the names of people who were writing and were being published was too much for him. He envied them their industry, their productivity, most of all, their reputation. He saw how cheap many of them were and at the same time what utility or success they achieved.

"Take these ducks," he said to me, "how they put it over with the great public. How they vulgarize or force and overstate or fake. I suppose if you are going to get a hearing in a great republic you've got to be a mountebank one way or another. If you're going to make any dent."

"I reckon so," I said. "Of course it's a price to pay."

"It's selling out."

"Of course you don't have to make a dent. You can write for your own kind your own way. You can take your choice between what you might call being a private author and being a public author."

"The public can go to hell so far's I'm concerned," he said.

Poor Arthur! He had the sincerity of a great talent. But he wanted to be first; he had no mind to be a little brother in the humble brotherhood of art. He wanted public fame but not by public means; he was the poor cat i' the adage all over again: he wanted the fish but did not want to wet his paws. In the end, he lived by the pride that had been handed on to him by a long family line of Southern gentlemen who wished their wives to have been belles before marriage and to be grand dames afterward, and ladies who wished their husbands to be colonels.

"What does it matter?" he said. "Nobody minds this loud, smarty style of writing that I see so much on all sides. People think that's a way of putting it over; it doesn't matter what you say; those who don't know any better will think it's true, those who do will think it's snappy."

Arthur's tone was dogged and perverse. No, he could never let you come at him, not close. The things he really believed he believed secretly; the things he had learned he believed pugnaciously and was always exaggerating.

As Arthur talked I sat thinking how easy it was to see how Lena might be drawn to him. I saw the glowing skin, and the fine eyes in that handsome

moody face; I felt that effect he gave, as if some volume of intimacy poured from him to me; I felt the spell of his unreasoning warmth, a certain rashness that he had, an authority of violence.

I suppose what Arthur had that distinguished him from so many more agreeable, popular or careless people was the way in which he was intense within himself. There was about him something, whether it was good or evil, that was concentrated and compelling. You got from him sometimes what is the deepest appeal a man can have: a concentration of all of him, mental, physical, and social, into one thought, one desire, and nothing so moves us as that last cry of the body.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE birthday came off with flying colors, but I could not be there; I was in bed with a cold caught from walking in the rain. I tramped one day to Farley's Mountain, and while I was there on the top, the wind brought a rain down. It was a white, spring rain, and I did not stop at any farmhouse on the way but walked on in it, and then when the rain stopped was going for two miles, drenched to the skin, in a cold wind that followed.

For the birthday party the house was full and the guests pushed out on to the porch and into the garden. More people now than ever felt kindly toward Uncle Abner, since he no longer competed with any of them in any way, and they were touched at the thought of his sitting there at home without so many months perhaps to live. Uncle Abner had greeted them all, Lena told me, with the same cordiality and been as delighted as a child that they should come to celebrate the day with him, but he got many of their names mixed up and seemed dazed and tired long before the end. What seemed to impress him most, out of all his guests and all the presents, was that the men at his fraternity had sent Fatty Barrell with the greetings of the chapter, which he delivered in his huge football voice, and then repeated all over again.

The week after the party Uncle Abner had a stroke. He was lying in bed for the two hours that Doctor Fernandez had prescribed for him every day

after dinner when he felt his legs suddenly numb and his head whirling. He was frightened and leaped up out of bed, as he called his sister. But sitting up in his chair he was soon better, and by the time Doctor Fernandez arrived the color had come back to his cheeks. His feet were better but a numbness kept up in his left arm. Doctor Fernandez gave directions and promised to come again next day for a general examination.

I went over to Heaven Trees soon after. Uncle Abner was sitting in his hickory armchair on the front porch and looking absently out into the garden.

"Brother Ab's rosy, isn't he, Hal?" said Cousin Bessie. "Doctor Fernandez says he's been all over him and he's in good condition."

Uncle Abner did not take his eyes off the garden outside. "Well," he said; "with all due respect to the doctor, I'd have a better opinion of him if he hadn't said it."

"Ah, Brother Ab, no. Hal, these shocks scare him, and you couldn't blame him. But Doctor Fernandez has taken a great deal of pains, he's done you lots of good, hasn't he, Brother Abner?"

"Yes. He's a fine young doctor. He'll do well. Has already."

"And this is the first spell Brother Abner's had in months."

"Yes, I've felt well. My appetite's good. I eat too much."

"Hal, you should have seen him at the party, with the ladies around him," Miss Bessie said, and she began to tell me who had come and who had brought the handkerchiefs and neckties and flowers. Every one had come, Miss Bessie said, but two or three

broken-down preachers who had had her brother visiting them for years without ever charging them a cent.

"Oh, well, Sis Bessie," Uncle Abner said, trying to dismiss the subject, "it's no more than customary. Doctor Fernandez is attending them now the same way."

"That doesn't excuse them from showing a little appreciation of the past."

"Well, people are different, you know."

"You see, Hal," she said, turning to me, "that's the way Brother Ab is. You may be sure I used to beg him to let the old things rot in their tracks. They all ran to him."

"Well, you just ask Doctor Fernandez, Sis Bessie, you just ask Doctor Fernandez."

"I'll wager Doctor Fernandez doesn't go 'way out fifteen miles in the country, with a horse and buggy, to see old Brother what's-his-name, that Methodist one."

"Gates."

"Yes, Gates. After Brother Ab had been out there three or four times, Hal, and got the old thing well, he had to let him come here and stay. Right up there in the room Cousin Cornelia has now. Stayed a week. And brought his medicine to the table to take, until he went to bed and stuck there, and then that summer he wanted to sell a rickety old horse he had, and got furious and quit speaking to Brother Ab because Brother Ab told somebody who asked him, that it was an old horse; said Brother Ab was working against him behind his back."

"Well," her brother said, "people are mighty nice to me."

"If they are, it's no more than they well might be."

Uncle Abner smiled, as he caught my eyes.

"Where's Cornelia?" he asked.

"She's up-stairs making herself a jabot to wear Commencement. It's lilac, of course."

The doctor chuckled.

"Cornelia's a great girl. All the Backus girls were always great on lilac."

Miss Cornelia herself appeared at the door, with her velvet ribbon in her hand, and behind her Lena.

"What's that about the Backus girls, Cousin Abner?"

"I said all the Backus girls were great on lilac."

"Well, ma used to say it was her color too. She was left-handed, and her mother was, and I'm left-handed. These things run in the family."

"Well, there's nothing to be said against lilac."

"I'm glad there's something nice in the world. Did you read in the paper this morning, Cousin Hal, about the little baby that died from carbolic acid? The nurse thought it was some oil or something and she rubbed his little stomach with carbolic acid and the poor little thing died. It was terrible!"

"Did you know the people, Cousin Cornelia?" I asked.

"No, but I read it. Poor little thing!"

"Well, sir, you'd think Cornelia had been there," Uncle Abner said.

"Well, what I can't stand are these grinning bird-women with their flying-machines. Didn't you see their pictures in the paper again? I was hoping we'd get shet of 'em for good."

Miss Bessie gave a little chuckle, at which her cousin turned sharply on her.

"And why the smile, pray?"

"Oh, go on, Cousin Cornelia."

"Well, as for Cousin Bessie, we won't see her flying," Miss Cornelia said, smiling as she took up her sewing; "not if she knows it."

"She's like nobody but herself," Lena said, making up conversation.

"Oh, of course, I know you think I'm an old curiosity, Eleanor," Miss Cornelia said, suddenly, turning to Lena.

"Why, Cousin Cornelia, don't be silly; Lena thinks you're a darling," I said.

"I don't see why you say that, Cousin Cornelia," Lena said, going up and putting her arm around the thin old shoulders; her face was troubled.

"Oh, nonsense," I interrupted again.

"Don't mind me, I'm just an old fool—you're perfectly lovely to me, precious." Miss Cornelia patted Lena's hand. I hoped that Lena could take it all as she would a child's whim.

I lit a cigarette and sat smoking. Nobody talked. After a while, I turned to the doctor:

"Uncle Abner," I said, "what are you plotting now?"

"Son, I was just thinking——"

"What, Uncle Ab?"

"Well—death's a terrible thing, isn't it?"

Poor old man, I had never seen anybody hate so much the idea of dying. Not of leaving anything in particular or being cut off in the midst of some project or purpose; it was merely the idea of not being alive any more. "Well," I thought, "why shouldn't you hate the idea of it? You've led a clean life, in a clean, fine body; you've been kind; you are always interested."

I went over and stood by him. "Let's hope we'll all be here together a long time yet. We won't mourn yet, Uncle Abner."

"Let's hope so. Son, I've never known any difference but what you'd been my own son."

"I know it," I said.

"What day's this?"

"It's Thursday, Uncle Ab."

"The fifteenth of May?"

"The sixteenth."

"That okra ought to be coming in soon for you, Hal. I planted a row for you this year. Nobody in this house likes it; we generally don't have okra any more."

"That's fine," I said. "You'll see how I like it. Oh, man!"

That was Wednesday. On Saturday afternoon as I came into the hall at Friendship I heard Lena's voice crying out: "Is that you, Auntie? Come quick!"

"No, it's Hal," I said, as I ran up the stairs. "What is it? Where are you, Lena?"

"In here, in father's room."

I saw Doctor Dandridge sitting up in his bed, his face white as wax and his eyes staring. Lena sat holding him up. She asked me to call Doctor Fernandez as quick as I could.

I rushed out to the telephone in the hall downstairs; Doctor Fernandez said to give the powders; he thought they would bring Doctor Dandridge around. It was probably another spell like the last. If Uncle Abner was not better soon, call him again. At all events he'd stop by after supper on his way home.

I went back to Lena. Uncle Abner was holding on

to her like a child. He kept saying: "If he doesn't come, I'll die. If he doesn't come, I'll die."

"I've already given him the powders. There's nobody in the house," Lena said; "nobody here but me."

She had been up with her father the night before and had just lain down a few minutes ago to get some rest, when he called.

"Why doesn't he come?" Uncle Abner said again.

Then all of a sudden he realized that it was too late and gave up. He put his hands together for a moment and tried to pray, like a little boy, he was so scared. Then his head fell forward and sidewise on Lena's breast, as she held him in her arms.

"He's dead, Lafe," she sobbed. "See if you can get Auntee! They said they were going to Aunt Genie's, just for a minute."

I telephoned the Holmes. Miss Bessie and Miss Cornelia were on their way home now. Doctor Fernandez met them as they came to the gate; he had decided to be on the safe side and not wait till after supper for his visit.

I did not go up-stairs again, but, after I had done what there was to do about arrangements, telephoning, notifying various people, and so on, I stood in the hall while one friend after another came to see Lena and Miss Bessie and to ask what they could do. Some of them went into the kitchen and began to see about the housekeeping. Other callers arrived.

Later in the afternoon Lena came down-stairs to see them. I knew that she would have liked to stay in her room but thought this the polite thing to do. It was what her father would have done and would have expected of her.

I was on the porch when Arthur came.

"I just heard," he said, "just half an hour ago."

"Of course it was sudden," I said.

"How is Lena? Do you think she would want to see me?"

"I'll tell her. You'd better go in the dining-room. There are so many people everywhere else."

Lena held on to my hand when we reached the dining-room where Arthur was and kept me from leaving them. Arthur, at the far end of the room, by the window, came forward, but Lena did not take his hand.

"You're sweet to come, Arthur," she said. Her fingers were twitching in mine.

"I only heard this half hour," he said, reddening.

"Father died so quickly."

She was moving back, so that we stood by the table, across from Arthur.

"Is there anything I can do, Lena?"

She was looking away from him.

"I know there's so little that can help. But is there anything I can do?" he said.

"I don't think so. I'll see you soon again."

She did not look at him, and he started for the door.

"Good-by. I'm so sorry."

"Thank you for coming, Arthur."

"Why, imagine not!" he said.

I was miserable for them both, but there was nothing to do. When I came back for Lena she was sitting at the table with her head in her arms. I shut the door and left her alone there.

After supper that night Uncle Joe and Camillus Floyd came to sit up with the dead. Later one of

the boys from the fraternity was to come and Uncle Joe would go home. Miss Bessie and Miss Cornelia were up-stairs in Lena's room, and I went out on the porch and sat on the steps, leaning my back against one of the columns.

I sat there till after ten o'clock in the warm spring night. The moon had not yet risen, the sky was clear and full of stars, the light from the hall streamed through the open door and out on the gravel walk. It was very quiet.

I thought of my childhood in this old place, and of my mother; then of Uncle Abner and the women up-stairs mourning for him, of Lena most. He had died in her arms.

CHAPTER XLVII

I HAD not realized the impression that Doctor Dandridge's death would make on me, when I had sat there that night on the porch steps thinking of women and how their pity and love upholds our life; and of how, while the male flies around in his foolish or profound necessity, the women have the common sense and bear the burden of patience.

But the day of the funeral brought what had happened nearer to me.

Miss Bessie and Lena and I were in the room where Uncle Abner's body was. In a few minutes they were going to close down the coffin lid. Lena sat by the window and I was holding one of her hands in both of mine.

"You don't want to see him, Lafe?"

"No, no," I said, "I'd rather remember him as I've seen him always."

"He looks so pretty," she sobbed.

Lena came back to her seat and I stood beside her stroking her hand and thinking of that divinity in women by which now she had taken this old man and his finished life into her arms like a child.

She drew her hand away and turned to me.

"Look at him, Lafe, I'd like you to."

To please her I went over and walked past the coffin, but tried to close my eyelids and see as little as I could. I saw only the whiteness of the skin, the blue under the eyes, and that the nose looked more aquiline and thinner. The whole expression was one of innocence and pride, a great distinction of clean-

ness and pride. He had looked like that sometimes, like a little boy, bless his heart!

I went back and stood by Lena. She took my hand again, and leaned her face against me, crying.

"Doesn't he look so sweet?" she said.

She went over and stood a long time looking down at her father.

The funeral was such as Uncle Abner himself would have liked. It was friendly, informal, and old-fashioned, though I could not help noticing that the preacher in his prayer made the mistake, when he said *between Thou and he*, that Uncle Abner out of the whole grammar most disliked, and the choir sang off the key, which he, however, would not have noticed, for he had no ear and knew but one tune, *Dixie*, and that he had learned as a soldier. At the grave, when the coffin was lowered, friends took the shovels and threw on the first earth, before the negro workmen began. People from all over the county had come, many of them poor people and negroes whom he had been kind to. They stood in groups while the grave was being filled. It was late afternoon, the sky a little overcast, and the old graveyard with its box walks and marbles and cedar trees looked quiet and lonely.

There was something terrible for other people, almost unfair, I thought, about loving life as Uncle Abner had done, and hating to leave it so. Coming away and leaving him there like that, you felt as if he were some little boy, and you were going off to the party, and would not let him come along.

For days afterward my mind was full of thoughts about Uncle Abner, and I knew that Lena's was too. He and she had loved each other and had felt com-

fortable together; she felt easier with him sometimes than I did, or even his sister. But when it came to saying what he was like, we both found ourselves often at sea. He was brave, and full of high spirits, pride, and recklessness, all together. In the war he had always been the first to volunteer when there was something risky to do—several old soldiers had told us that; and all his life he had gone into dangerous things, fires, high water in the country creeks, runaway horses, epidemics; but how much he had realized the danger, what part a lack of imagination played in the risks he took where other men were afraid, we had no idea. The root point, I decided, at which the uncertainty of my knowledge of him began, was the nature of his imagination. I knew so little what sort of imagination he had.

Uncle Abner had been a fine doctor, especially with children, careful and patient, but to all appearances quick and unreflective. He made no psychological and flattering analyses, invented no special and interesting cases that are grateful to patients' egotisms, but he had a gift for diagnosis and often saw directly into the seat of the trouble. To know how good a doctor he was, you must have had brains enough to judge men by their fruits, not by your mood in their presence.

He loved oratory in the old style, which he listened to like a child; he loved to read aloud because he liked to hear the fine words in his mouth, and yet he had no literary tastes of any kind. I should not have called Uncle Abner a religious man, in the poetic, inner sense; the idea of God was not close to him. And yet he walked so uprightly, never lied, was never suspicious or low; and he had so strict a

line of conduct for himself that he followed it regardless of his own expense or what it cost other people. I should not have said that he had much sentiment, but about that I felt no certainty. Only at the very last, after all the years I had been with him, did he say to me one day, when we were talking about prohibition:

“Well, I’ve never been in a saloon in my life. I promised my mother when I was a boy and I never have.”

He had always spoken simply of his wife, dead now twenty years, as if she were still alive; but this last year, when he was more absent-minded, he began to call Lena by her mother’s name. “Come here, Annie,” he would say. And he would often say that she was looking more like her mother as she grew older. “You looked like your mother when you did that,” he said; “yes, your mother’s eyes. You’re not as pretty a woman as your mother was.”

I turned my thoughts of him over in my mind, now that his life was ended and the sum of it to be seen, and tried to understand the nature of his goodness. We might as well do that, I thought, as one way of not turning sour and dry within. It could do no harm, keeping ourselves sweet with the dead.

The day of Uncle Abner’s funeral, I was looking at Lena’s mother’s tombstone, reading again the verse that he had chosen for it; and I suddenly realized how he had revealed himself in it.

“Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.”

I imagined that he had chosen it not after reflection and a long search for something suitable, but by

a clear impulse, which he followed clearly, without much afterthought.

Lena knew her father better than I did, but for all that there were many things about him that she did not know very definitely; he seemed to need understanding and a protecting love; and this made her feel toward him something like a mother, and so added a second sorrow to her loss.

CHAPTER XLVIII

ARTHUR had asked my advice as to what he should do about Doctor Dandridge's funeral, and I advised him to go in company with some of the other young professors. No engagement had ever been announced between him and Lena, and that way seemed best. I promised to tell Lena what I had said to him.

For those first days afterward I had a notion that Lena would have preferred not seeing Arthur. You would think that the person you loved best in the world would be the very one you would want most at such a time. But in this case, no, I did not think so. It was a part of the cruelty of the situation.

I was sorry when Arthur came by and asked me to go with him to Friendship. If he had the instinct not to go alone, as he usually went, he ought to have known better than to go at all, not for a few days at least. Nevertheless, we went. It was the day after the funeral, late in the afternoon. We met in the library. Lena thanked him for the flowers he had sent. We talked a little, but got nowhere. It was only repeating that visit in the dining-room the day Uncle Abner died. I rose to leave them, thinking it might be easier without a third person. But Arthur rose too.

"We just came to let you know we were thinking of you, Lena," I said.

"Yes, Lena," Arthur said.

She turned to the window but then turned again and came and shook hands with us.

"Good-by, Arthur, thank you. Good-by, Hal."

"Good-by, honey," I said.

"Good-by, Lena," Arthur said.

Arthur walked along beside me for a while without saying anything.

"Hal, were we wrong to go?" he asked suddenly.

"She'll appreciate our coming," I said, "but I reckon seeing us reminded her of so much, don't you reckon?"

"I don't know," he said, his face flushing.

I went by Friendship next day for a few minutes, and then every day toward the end of the afternoon for a little visit at least. Arthur must have been there at other hours, when he went, for I never saw him. Miss Bessie had asked me to come. "Lena ought to have some change from the family all day, or Arthur Lane," she said.

Sometimes I stayed longer and read aloud to Lena, things out of the papers mostly.

She insisted on going to the cemetery every morning to her father's grave, and Miss Bessie was troubled about it. Lena's mother had done the same thing when her little son died and now Lena was just like her.

"The poor darling seems to think her father'd like her coming. But I say, 'Baby Girl, it's morbid. Your father wouldn't want anything except what was good for you!'"

"She'll soon feel differently," I said; "give her time, Cousin Bessie."

"Oh, yes, time. But now, poor child, she seems to think she didn't do her part by Brother Abner, or something. I can't understand that. Brother Abner

always said she'd never given him a moment's anxiety. I tell her that. I say: 'Baby Girl, how many times you've heard your papa say you'd never given him a moment's anxiety?' But she won't mind me."

CHAPTER XLIX

It was ten days or more after my call with Arthur that I arrived one afternoon later than usual because of a shower and met Miss Bessie coming out of the gate with Miss Cornelia.

"Honey, I wish we could stay and see you," she said. "But it rained and I've been waiting to take this cousin of mine to get some shoes. You have to knock her down to make her get herself something."

"Well, I'm enough trouble as it is," Miss Cornelia said, stubbornly and not smiling.

"Now, just listen at that, Hal. Isn't that silly for you! Cousin Cornelia, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, kicking up like that." Miss Bessie looked as if she could kill her cousin on the spot.

Miss Cornelia smiled.

"Very well, Elizabeth, come on, we'll get me two pairs of shoes."

Miss Bessie slapped her hand.

"Cornelia Backus, I've got a good mind to make you get two pairs, madam."

"Your money, my dear. My philosophy is 'and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take away thy coat also.' Or that's what I believe in for other people."

"Oh, my stars, she's on the other side now! Well, come on, please. Hal, you'll find Lena in the study, it's too wet on the porch. Mr. Lane's there, he's been here a long time to-day."

"Arthur's there?"

"Yes, they sit here and talk. But it doesn't seem to do Lena any good. I notice her."

I said nothing.

"Hal, sometimes I just wish he wouldn't come."

"Lena'd know about that," I said, trying to console her.

"I reckon so."

"Lena would know what was best."

"Well, now, I'm not so positive about that. Lena generally knows well enough what she wants with the rest of us. But when it comes to Arthur, the child seems all at sea sometimes."

"I could hear his lovely voice up-stairs in my room just now, I mean now and then," Miss Cornelia added. "I'm glad I never had a suitor with a voice like that. I shouldn't believe a word he said, but I'd tremble before him."

"Oh, come on, Cornelia Backus, you and your lovely voice! I'd like to see you tremble, madam." Miss Bessie gave her a push in the back.

I found Lena and Arthur in the study. He was sitting beside her on the sofa, leaning toward her. Lena was pale, but I could see by her eyes when she looked up that she was angry.

"I'm interrupting?" I asked. "Shall I run on?"

"No, Hal," she said, in a hard voice, "please come in. You know what we're talking about."

I sat down by the window.

"You've talked it over?"

"Yes," she said, "and what's it come to? Arthur wants to stay here. And he's done nothing since Christmas."

Arthur looked at her. "My University work."

"Which you don't care two raps about."

"And besides, you know it's not just being in Clearwater that I've not written so much. You know

it's the way we stand, Lena. This not seeing you, this stewing and strain, and for months coming here making social calls. You know it's this partly."

She went on:

"Nothing since before Christmas really."

"I've mapped out several things," he retorted. "As you know."

"And how good are they?"

He reddened but said nothing. Lena went on:

"No more poetry, no more acting either. Arthur wants to keep me here, Hal, in Clearwater. He'd even marry the fallen creature!"

"By God, you've had too much theatre already, when you rant like that!" Arthur jumped up and started to walk up and down before he added in a gentler tone—"I've never even had such a thought, and you know it."

Lena turned to him, almost crying. "Oh, no, Arthur, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. We're just hurting each other."

"Look," I said; "let's go, Arthur. Lena's all worn out. She's had a lot. We're not doing any good. Let's go. Some other time."

"No, don't go," she pleaded. "I'm sorry. It seems too bad to be hurting each other when life's so—as it is."

Arthur came and stood over her. "I know," he said.

She leaned her head against him.

"Lena, I'll go. I won't stay in Clearwater," he said after a moment. "I won't stay. If you'll marry me, darling."

She drew away from him again. "But, Hal, he's putting it up to me. You're making me save you, Arthur."

He spoke very loud: "Nobody has to save me. And I'm hardly asking you to sacrifice yourself. If it comes to that!"

"You know I didn't mean that."

"Why don't you both wait, for God's sake?" I repeated, rising and going over to them. "This just makes a mess. Lena, honey, I've seen times like this before. People are always sorry afterward."

"But, Hal, what I can't understand is why we talk of marriage now." I could see that Lena was on some scent; she had grown much quieter and meant to get to the bottom of things. She persisted: "If we are going to talk of marriage now. What I can't understand is why we didn't marry long ago."

"You couldn't afford it?" I said.

"There's no more money now than then. Just a dab, anyhow. I had that impression, I know. Is there any more money, Arthur?"

"No. There's not."

She was looking closely at him. "Then it was theory? Not with you, Arthur, you've never talked about freedom in love and so on—you hated the studio talk."

Arthur frowned. "I most certainly have not," he said.

"But, Arthur—" she began. He had taken a letter from his pocket.

"Tell me, then, won't you, Arthur?"

"Will you read this letter? Let Hal see it."

He took the letter out of the envelope and gave it to Lena. I read it over her shoulder. It was a brief notice sent from Paris, of the divorce granted Arthur and Norma Lester Lane. When she had read it, Lena sat holding the letter between her hands and looking at the floor across the room.

"Why, Arthur——"

He had been trying to face it out, but at the pitiful tone of her voice he dropped on his knees by the arm of the sofa and began to read the letter himself: "Paris, May third, nineteen twenty-seven. Monsieur Arthur— Lena! Lena, my darling, when I tell you—you know I love you—you see now I'm free to marry— But before this——"

She did not look up. "Oh, no, oh, no! Hal, you and Arthur go now, will you please?"

Without raising her eyes she held the letter out to him. Arthur took it and left the room.

"Good-by, Lena," I said.

She looked up at me. "Lafe, darling——"

"Good-by," I said.

She threw her arms around my neck.

"Look, precious," I said, "don't you care."

"Oh, Lafe——"

"Yes, I know."

"Lafe, I'm glad father's dead."

"Honey, you go on up-stairs and get some rest," I said.

"All right, I will. Come to see us."

CHAPTER L

ON the porch outside Arthur was waiting for me. We walked round by the chapel and through the grove and out by Willow Street to his room. We went along in silence. Arthur was smoking a cigarette. He had a taut, defensive air. I could see that more than anything ever before in our acquaintance this that he had to tell me now—whatever it was—hit his pride.

He entered his room ahead of me and, putting his hat on the table, began to walk about as if nobody were there but himself. He spoke suddenly:

"Hal, I know you think I'm a cad."

"I don't judge," I said.

"I'm just a God-damned fool! Do you think she'll ever forgive me?"

"Better tell me first what it was. I know Lena loved you——"

"Loved me, yes, did. But now?"

"Arthur, sit down, have a cigarette? Have you got anything to drink?"

"No. I never have had in Clearwater. It's about time I got some, I think. You remember Cheney? Hal, you sit down, pardon me."

I sat down on his bed. "Cheney?"

"That bloated ass you saw in my room one day on his way to Paris."

"And you were wishing him such luck. Yes."

"Well, she's marrying him, my wife. Marrying Cheney. That's why I got the divorce at last."

"When did you marry, Old Top?" I tried to speak quietly.

"The last month of the war, about. Or six weeks."

"Well, your war record was bright enough, if that's any consolation."

"Oh, yes, war record," he replied. "I need something decent to remember."

I had long since gathered a notion of Arthur's part during the war. At the very beginning of it he felt the stir of the excitement and heroic action, and his prejudice in favor of England, from which he drew all the blood in his veins, made it his war from the first. When the Allied propaganda began to spread over the country he swallowed it all, word for word, as the simplest man in the streets might have done, and was for volunteering abroad at once, in France or in England. He would not have admitted this credulous simplicity, however, even to himself; his mind was excited with visions and impulses out of its own splendor; he made himself up a magnificent call to go across the seas and enlist.

Arthur now was telling me his story. On the boat going over sat at his table a woman, older than he was, she must have been thirty, with red hair and white skin. She was tall and her figure rather full. They talked, danced together at night after dinner. Her husband was a professor in the West somewhere, a man past fifty. He had let her come to France on some hospital commission. Arthur and she travelled to Paris together and when they parted at the Gare du Nord they promised to meet again. Next afternoon he heard a knock at his door, opened it, and there she was. She would never tell him how she had got the name of his hotel. That was the first time

they had kissed. She had come to tell him, she said, that she ought not to meet him again; feeling about him the way she did seemed unfair to her husband. She had come to say good-by and good luck. Instead of saying good-by he had let her stay there in his arms, which she seemed willing enough to do.

All that afternoon she was in his room, and next day she moved into his hotel. That went on for a month, while he began his training in aviation; then she went to St. Jean de Luz, and when his leave came he went to see her there. Later, when they were in Paris again, she had an apartment and he saw her from time to time, less often, however. He was away then for months together in the Balkans, now and then in Paris, but gone most of the time.

Two months before the Armistice he was ordered back to Paris. By then Eunice—her name was Eunice—had made friends with a young woman from Worcester named Lester, Norma Lester, who had come over for war work but had ended by just careering with Americans in Paris. Her father thought she was in some organization; he was a millionaire and sent her all the money she wanted. She was not so tall as Eunice, and kept herself like a race-horse, trim and hard.

One night when Arthur and another chap were dining with them, Eunice and Norma had a row. It was about President Wilson, and they ended by not speaking to each other. Norma got even by managing to have Arthur take her home; Eunice had to go with the other man. After that, Eunice told Arthur he had to choose between the two of them.

"Well, if you put it like that," he said, and walked out. He walked straight to Norma. Not that he

cared a damn about her. She was hard and common, and too crazy about men, anybody could see she was crazy about men. She had all that money to spend and wanted him to go about with her. He hated a woman's paying the bills. She called that some sort of out-of-date Southern rot; what was she to do with so much money? She was always talking about her money. He began to kick himself for running with riffraff like that. Then one day he saw her dancing with Cheney at the Crillon. Rich swine, Arthur had hated him from the time Cheney tried to snub him, that was when he first came to Paris. He decided to show him a thing or two, he cut into the dance and carried Norma off. That night, when they were drunk, they got married.

Next day there was a quarrel. He said things to her you don't say to a woman, like dirty stage stuff. He had even accused her of getting him drunk to marry him, a regular common row. She said he might be a Southern gentleman but he was glad enough to get his hands on a little money. She said he'd merely been trying to rook Cheney, because he knew she loved Cheney, who was crazy about her and had been for three years. She and Arthur parted without people's knowing they had ever been married. But when it came to a show-down she wouldn't give him a divorce. To spite him for what he had said. She said: "Not till I get good and ready. I'll see you in hell first!"

Then the Armistice had come and he was leaving for America.

"Just the same, I'll see you in hell first," she said again.

They had at least agreed to keep the marriage

secret; he was ashamed of the whole thing, and she was afraid her father would cut her off if he heard of it.

"But he'll hear of it now," I said, when Arthur left his story and sat smoking a cigarette.

"Yes, but don't you see it won't matter now, she's marrying Cheney's millions. That'll pacify father, the dirt of it all won't trouble them, not that lot."

Arthur paused and a contemptuous look came on his face.

"I knew better all along. I remember when I first knew she was the Lester Shirts I said to Eunice: 'It's rural, of course, and backwoods, but I can't get used to the notion of giving your family name to a business product. Shirts, tires, chewing-gum, tonics, even if the people who do it are millionaires. It's a kind of aristocracy I don't understand.' I said that. But you see how much that stopped me, don't you?"

"So that was why you were rushing Cheney off to Europe."

"Yes. How's that for common! I'm just damned common, that's all. Me and my secret, like movie stuff!"

"She got the divorce so she could have him?"

"Exactly. So I'm free of her," he said, sullenly.

"My God, Arthur!"

"I don't wonder you're disgusted. Do you think Lena'll ever forgive me?"

"But why didn't you tell Lena about this? I mean when you first began to be in love with her."

"I was in love with Lena the first time I saw her."

"I see."

"You couldn't expect me to tell her at once, the very first shot."

"Perhaps not. But she'd have understood it if you'd told her, told her later. She might have loved you all the more for your being in such a mess, Old Top. Why in hell didn't you tell Lena?"

He got up and began to walk about. "I just couldn't. I couldn't stand it. I might have told her I was married, but not this marriage, not this crap. I couldn't have her see me as common as that."

"Then most of it was pride?"

"Yes, if you like. It makes me sick to think I could have sunk to it."

"Poor Arthur!" I thought, but said nothing. He came and bent over me.

"Tell me, Hal, do you think she'll ever forgive me? When she knows how it was? Why it was I couldn't tell her?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid she won't," I said.

"Now that it's over? By God, it's over, you see."

"It's not just forgiving, I should think; it's that the whole thing has been resting on a lie. You can see that, Arthur. It's all got crooked."

"I know," he said, and then sat down and buried his face in his hands.

"The point is—" I hesitated.

"The point's what?"

"It's just the kind of thing one doesn't do, that's all."

He made no reply, and presently I took up my hat to go.

"Don't you think Lena ought to know all this?" I said.

"Yes. She won't see me, I know."

"I'm not so sure of that."

"Well, will you tell her, Hal?"

"She was stunned just now, but she'll be torn every which way wondering what it all was, and what it was so terrible that happened to you. She couldn't have ever loved you if she doesn't feel that."

"You'll tell her."

"I'll write her a letter, Arthur, that's the best way."

"You sound as if I were dead."

"Good-by," I said.

He flushed with anger as he put out his hand.

"Good-by. And thanks," he said.

When I got to my room I wrote Lena as straight an account as I could and sent it by the janitor. It was not a long letter, and at the end of it I said that unless she wished it we would never mention it again. That was to save her pride. I did not want her to dread seeing me again.

Then I sat down and wrote another letter. I begged the president of the University to convey my thanks to the Board of Trustees for the honor they paid me and to express my regrets that my plans for the following year would prevent my acceptance; for the present at least I did not propose to engage in any academic work but to devote all my time to writing. Respectfully, et cetera.

CHAPTER LI

My impulse to send a letter, which Lena could read alone without having me there when she learned Arthur's explanation, had been right. I was glad I had told her that way instead of face to face. When I went to Friendship, skipping a day before I should see Lena again, Miss Bessie told me that she was in her room trying to rest; we had better not disturb her.

"Is there anything I can do, Cousin Bessie?" I asked.

She turned to close the door of the study. "No, nothing; not to-day, at least. The child just lies up there on her bed."

"Has Arthur been here?"

"No. I think he's got something to do with it; I don't know what. It's a poor time for that now, Hal. The child just lies up there on her bed. Hal, I think he's a mess, a perfect mess!"

"He's weak," I said, "but he's a good chap." I was trying to say something.

"I wish he had never come here to Clearwater. So biggity!"

"That's partly because he's afraid of himself. It's pride."

"Well, there's pride and pride, I say. I hope she never sees him again."

"The best way is to say let's hope she never wants to see him again."

Miss Bessie's eyes filled with tears, and she turned away her head.

"Hal, you've got a lot of sense."

"Otherwise," I said, "it's just wishing her more misery."

"I know you're right, Hal. I'm just so sorry."

"We'll just have to wait."

"If she'd only cry more! It would be better. Honestly, I don't know what the child's got on her mind so."

All the way home I kept trying to think of some one that I could talk the whole thing over with and get advice. But I had not a single being in all Clearwater to go to. I cursed the provinces and thought of New York with longing. Then I found myself heading straight for the house where Arthur lived.

Arthur was lying on the bed in his waistcoat and shirt-sleeves. He got up when I knocked and entered, but did not shake hands.

"Hello, Arthur," I said. "How are you?"

"Fair enough," he said, in a sullen voice.

It was absurd to ask how he was. I could see that he had been on a drinking spell, he was red around the eyes and his face looked puffed and red. Even at that, he looked romantic and handsome, I had to observe; it seemed to have slipped my memory how handsome he was.

Arthur was still standing up, so I stood.

"I wrote the letter, Arthur," I began, at length. "To Lena."

"To Eleanor?"

"Yes."

"Thanks. I felt sure you would."

"I promised to."

"You damn well did." He gave me a look.

"Well, what does that mean?"

"What I said. Means it was your chance."

"My chance?"

"To come right down to brass tacks, didn't you love Eleanor about as much as I did?"

"Well, by God!—" But I controlled myself. "Arthur," I begged, "don't take it like that. I grew up like Lena's brother. And if I loved her when I was a kid, in college at first, all that's over long ago."

"That's for you and Eleanor to say. It's not my business."

I looked at him, hoping that he was still drunk. But he was not. I put my hat on.

"You treated me like a dirty cad," he said, his eyes fixed sullenly on the floor, "both of you. She wouldn't even listen to me, and you good as told me what I was, afterward. And before she decided I was a cad, she's been treating me as if I were a child. For three months. I'm good and sick of being mothered like a God-damn child. You can tell her for me not to trouble, just count me out." He looked up at me with a sort of leer. "Besides, I've done without her so long I guess I can stand it now."

I made no answer, but turned to go. I wanted to knock him down.

"Tell her what you like," he went on.

"I won't tell her I've seen you at all," I said, and opened the door.

"Well, why not?" he said. "Doesn't she tell you everything? Doesn't everybody tell you everything, the understanding heart?"

"Good-by," I said.

"Wait," he called when I was half out. I turned back.

"Here's something. I'm leaving to-night. Got leave of absence for these last three weeks. I'm sick,

feeling rotten. I said I had an attack of sciatica. Said I was going to Hot Springs. Like hell, I am! But I'm returning in September."

"Good-by," I said and shut the door.

I dropped by Friendship next morning but did not see Lena, and two or three mornings later Silas brought a note from her asking me to come that afternoon.

I could not help thinking, as I went along, how differently I could have talked if it had been Judie instead of Lena. I could have said: "Look now, Judie, you've taught your body to need this man, you not only love him, your nerves cry for him. That's the difference once you've gone the limit in love. But you've given up this relation for months. You've weaned yourself from him. You know you can live without him, in that way. That fact can help you, the knowledge of it shows you can come through this crisis, which concerns your whole soul. Patience and time, you'll come out all right. We pay for everything in life. And besides, you may as well be done with it now, you couldn't go on with Arthur." I could have said this to Judie but not to Lena.

To Judie, in the first place, the cost of what had happened would have been different; but such a nature as Lena's knows to the full what all things cost.

And in the second place, I could, it was true, be direct with Lena in a kind of family frankness, but between us there were certain reserves like those between a brother and a sister.

There was no use telling myself nonsense about Arthur. There might be pride, pride hurt by poverty, quick temper, impetuous spirit, if you liked, plenty

of explanations and excuses. But he was a liar and a cad, weak or not weak, gifted or not gifted, and pathetic or not—we are all pathetic, if we start that argument. Lena would never be sure of any ground to stand on with him; she was well rid of him.

Lena came and joined me in the library. Her face was white and her eyes ringed with blue and hollow-looking, but she was calm as she sat there on the sofa and she talked in a low, quiet tone.

“So that’s the mood she’s in,” I thought. I knew it would pass. But for the time she seemed past all harassing memory or grief; only remote and gentle and quiet.

I was surprised at this tone, and could only explain it by saying to myself that Lena had known Arthur better than I did, known him also in a different relationship, and that she had had, then, perhaps for a long time—perhaps even without knowing it—a sense that Arthur was impossible.

“She has known a long time,” I thought, “that it would not do and that she’s only been putting off the end; and this knowledge of the end is what gave her love for him that sad, protecting thing that exasperated Arthur.” I could hear him saying: “I’m good and sick of being mothered, like a God-damn child.”

I was thinking this while Lena was talking of her father’s will. He had left half of his income to Lena, the other to Miss Bessie, to whom also went Friendship for her lifetime. The will expressly stated that Miss Cornelia was to have a home there as long as she lived.

“Bless his heart,” I said, when Lena told me; “can’t you see him when he thought of that?”

“Thinking not that Auntee wouldn’t keep her

at Friendship anyhow, but he just wanted Cousin Cornelia to feel she had a legal right to a place. That was like him, wasn't it? Arthur used to say father's actions had no foot-notes, but were just done, and that we'd have to live a long time before we had sense enough to see how right he was inside. Arthur could certainly get things very straight sometimes."

"Yes," I said. "Arthur's one of those people who miss a lot of things but when they do see something they hit the point."

"He certainly was."

When she had said this she sat there looking across the room, shaking her head slowly, as if she knew what she had lost forever.

It was this, more than the tone, that surprised me. She was speaking as if both of them, instead of only one, were dead.

"But, Lena, you talk as if—Lena, Arthur's not dead, honey."

I couldn't bear to see her sitting there like that.

"They say Arthur's gone away, Lafe."

"Yes, he's got a leave of absence for these last three weeks, Dean Withers told me. He's gone to Hot Springs, for rheumatism."

"Rheumatism?"

"Dean Withers said an attack of rheumatism. He'll be back in September." I said nothing more but sat there beside her till she rose and went to the window and stood there a long time looking out. Presently she turned to me.

"Lafe, tell me, I've been wondering, what do you think of immortality, do you believe in it?"

I longed for some strong faith to give, but only said what I could.

"Honey, how could I know? I just couldn't use the word *believe*, I suppose. But I don't see why not immortality. I should think there might be as much argument that it was true as that it was not true. We can say that at least."

She came back and sat down on the sofa beside me.

"Well, I believe it. I believe I'll see father again and be with him."

"Then you may, honey," I said.

"See father?"

"Yes."

"And I believe I'll see Arthur again."

I started and looked quickly at her, but she stopped me with her hand on my arm.

"Oh, I don't mean now. I mean some day after death, and not weak and lost, but I believe I'll see him again as he really is, in his soul."

I slipped to the floor, with my arms up over her knees and my face pressed against her.

"Lena, darling, I don't suppose there's anything I can do. But you're just like my little sister, I'd do anything in the world for you."

She said nothing, only laid her hands on my head.

CHAPTER LII

Dusk closed in, and after a while Miss Bessie came and found us sitting there on the sofa.

"Why, you chilluns are pitch dark, I can hardly see you," she said, as she felt for the switch by the door and turned on the light. "And Aunt Callie has the best supper waiting, best spoon-bread, and chicken!"

She tried to smile gaily, with her pinched little face and sad eyes. Lena went over and put her arm around her.

"And we're hungry as bears," she said.

But at supper I noticed that she scarcely touched her plate, and Miss Bessie, after a look, said nothing about it. Miss Cornelia tried to say funny things to make us all laugh, and told her story, which we had heard a hundred times, about Parson Bates, her grandfather's friend, who used to stay at Friendship in the very room she had now, and preach once a month at Clearwater. On one occasion, she said, Parson Bates was conducting a revival and a man who was a great drinker and card-player waited for him outside the church, in order to insult him with blasphemies about God. Parson Bates gave him a good thrashing. Said he: "Confound you, if I can't preach Christ into you, I reckon I can beat hell out of you!"

When I left, Lena walked to the gate with me. It was the dark of the moon and you could but dimly gather the outlines of the garden, with flowers here and there, and farther off a faint cloud where the syringas were and the yellow jasmine that Uncle

Abner had set so much store by. The light from the hall stretched out half way down the walk and touched some of the taller flowers. The sky was thick with stars.

"Look at the stars!" Lena said to me.

"If anything makes me believe in the truth of time it's the stars," I said.

"What do you mean, truth of time, Hal?"

"I mean the things the race has believed through the long course of time."

At the gate Lena put her hand on my arm: "Don't go, Lafe; stay and talk a minute."

I could feel her trembling as she withdrew her hand and stood leaning against one of the posts.

I had not meant to speak to her of herself again, but seeing her like that was different.

"Lena, honey, you're torturing yourself. Are you blaming yourself?"

"No, I'm all right. I just thought it would be nice to talk."

"What is it you are thinking about?"

"Well, your saying that about the stars and what the race has believed. I was wondering what you thought about sin and atonement."

"Lena, if yours and Arthur's love for each other had turned out better, I mean more what you hoped, you wouldn't be thinking like this. You're not so whatever you want to call it—conservative—as to think that just a marriage license would have changed that, are you?"

"No."

"And you must remember what you've just been through. You're all broken up."

"But what about what I asked you, Lafe?"

I had spent hours trying to think things out for myself and for Lena's sake. She had nobody else, certainly not Miss Bessie, who would forgive her through love but carry the shame and distress of it to her grave. I had asked myself time and again if I had it straight. "There must be some sense to things," I had said to myself. Then I said, "No, it's all rot, all chaos. We are as lost as animals, as the trees and stones growing and crumbling. No, if I were just trying to think for myself I might see it like that. It's a striking way to think about it. But this is for Lena. I must make sense, and I know down inside me what would be sense."

It was like this: we have inherited the vast and confused soul of the North, dark, troubled with the lonely conscience, tinged and concentrated with the old Hebraic strain. In such a way of life sin is death, and the thought of punishment and atonement works in the secret conscience; and stories grow up around the theme of death as the end of sin, the stories of Lady Macbeth and Clytemnestra, Guenevere, Anna Karenina, Othello, Paolo and Francesca, Madame Bovary——

Him that remembereth not, God hath forgotten. That was the system of conscience and right that Lena and I had been raised on. You may learn to throw all that out of your head, but throwing it out of your nerves is another matter. It stays with you one way or another.

What should we say sin was, then? It was like this:

A healthy body in a man or a tree is one complete in its own kind; there is nothing in it that is foreign to its own nature and substance; anything that is for-

eign to it or that it cannot turn to its own uses, it expels.

The same in a man, purity of quality arises from the singleness by which he takes on whatever is needed for his nature—takes it on only by this need, never through mere imitation or weakness—and throws off with a biological relentlessness what he cannot convert to his own kind. A great nature in a man arises through a combination in it of purity and force; purity in its own quality, force to nourish and express itself.

This is true for the individual within himself, and true for him in relation to other people, for all men in relation to each other. The health of a society, high or low, rests on the unity of its nature, and depends on the absence from it of hypocrisy, a confusion in desire and a culture that is false to it.

I had tried to say all this, and now I paused and waited for Lena to speak.

"We come at last to me, don't we, Lafe?" she said. "And what to you my sin is."

"I don't like the word *sin* for our use," I said. "We're too close to that word, and I'm still too close to Isaiah and Sinai to feel comfortable with it—it's still too close to the prophets—still 'for Rome too daring and for Greece too dark.'"

"You've been trying to think it out for me, haven't you, Lafe?"

"Yes, and the old son has nearly cracked his head trying to think straight."

"I know," she said, gently.

"I can almost recite it, Lena, those phrases, like a lecture, I've gone over it so much."

"I know."

"To begin with, then, you gave yourself wholly to a great passionate love, for the first time, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"But this love you couldn't bring into harmony with what you are. At the first it seemed you could; you lifted Arthur up to you."

"Not to me, don't put it like that, Lafe."

"To this love, then. But you found, some time or other, that he was not what you wanted him to be, what you loved, we'll say. Isn't that so?"

Lena said nothing. I could feel that a blush had spread up over her face.

"At any rate, his confession of that marriage and all the deception, I mean the whole thing resting on a lie—that brought you to the end, when Arthur told you he'd been lying to you."

"Yes, but——"

Her voice went so shrill that I caught her arm and said: "No, no, not so loud, it's no use, Lena."

"Lafe, but look. Didn't I deserve it—I'd been lying to father! I'd been doing the same thing!"

"Now, Lena, hold on to your wits; you know that was different. I'm begging you not to think that. You couldn't have told Uncle Ab the truth. It would have been a different thing the way he'd seen it, you know it would. Will you stop thinking that? It's not so, you know it. Will you?"

"Yes. I'll try."

"Then to come to the point—you saw that it all was impossible, on an impossible foundation——"

"I had known it a long time, Lafe, but I didn't want to see it."

"There you are," I answered. "Well, to go on—This love, this relationship, made lies necessary,

especially here at home. You couldn't tell your father or Cousin Bessie or the friends here, and Arthur had to keep pretending to people right and left."

"Yes."

"But we've got to be sensible. Some of what you did you had a right to do. You'll just have to hold on to that, it's a fact. If it caused other people pain that was inevitable; it was only another instance of the devouring of life by life that's everywhere in nature?"

"Life devouring life?"

"Yes. You see that."

Lena had moved away from the gate and stood with her hands down at her sides. "Yes, I see it."

"But a part of your soul lies in the people around you. There's the line in St. Paul in which he says we live in one flesh. In Greek he has that very word, *σῶμα*—flesh, body—brethren, we live in one another's bodies."

She was listening without moving. I went on:

"You've hurt your love for your father and Cousin Bessie, for all of us, I reckon."

She put out her hand.

"Wait, Lafe, let's be all honest this time."

"Honest?"

"Yes, don't spare me."

"I'm not sparing you. I'm being as honest as I can."

She leaned against one of the gate-posts and began to sob.

"But, Lena—" I said, "but honey—just now you were so quiet, listening. Don't cry."

"I'm not crying for myself. It's for that little boy. You know—Eugene."

My heart sank.

"Don't spare me, Lafe. I know I killed him. Auntie was talking about him the other day. She told me about his passing you all by the orchard, that day after Uncle Prout's. He was there by the orchard."

"Oh, darling, no; it was mostly his age. He'd been all knocked out for a long time."

"No, I know; you're sparing me." Her voice dropped to a moan. "But I know."

"Lena, you'll just have to use your head; everybody's got to use his head."

"But why should I cause all this pain? I don't see why I should have to cause all this pain for other people."

"I heard of a Hindoo who said: 'Capacity attracts.'"

"But, Lafe, that's words."

"But that's all I am, just words."

"No, Lafe, don't be silly." She turned to me gently, and I was ashamed of myself.

"That's right, it is silly," I said. "It's just egotism. Let's come back to you. What the Hindoo means is that you draw pain to you because you can feel pain so yourself."

"You can talk, but you ought've talked to Eugene," Lena said.

"You'll just have to use your head," I said.

"You try to help me through, Lafe. But I know."

"You'll have to use your head."

She began to clasp and unclasp her hands. "And what must I do; oh, can't you tell me what I must do, can't somebody?"

"Darling, you've been doing it already," I said, "and we oughtn't to go on and on talking like this. It'll break you down."

"I'm doing nothing, I'm doing nothing!"

"Yes, you are, of course you are. You are suffering the pain that all this costs you. Your soul ridding itself of its poison—I know that sounds like modern drama."

"I ought to die. I know I ought to die."

"It's just what you don't know. People don't kill themselves nowadays, they go on living. You know you have something in you that would make killing yourself only foolish. We can say it, but there's no conviction in it."

"No, there isn't," she said, as if she were speaking to herself.

"There's a mystery of atonement, yes, but death's not the only way. 'One soul working through the strength of love'—Æschylus says that about atonement."

"You always know something beautiful, Lafe."

"Listen, honey, please, won't you listen? Let's stay on the Greeks; they always make sense. Take Orestes. He had to avenge his father's murder by killing those who murdered him. One of them was his own mother. This deed was necessary to his own soul and to the gods' justice. But the doing of it had to be accompanied by things whose poison had to be purged from his own soul afterward. It was right for you to love, and it's right for you to suffer."

Lena was looking steadily at me. It broke my heart to see how she had controlled her tears.

"Lena, listen. We'll never talk about any of this any more and there's one thing you can remember you can always be thankful for."

"What, Lafe?"

"I can sav it quite neatly. I ought to, I've thought

so much about it. You have a nature so strong that it will always seek its own life passionately. And so pure that it will always suffer and move toward its own perfection."

As we turned back toward the house she took my hand and kissed it.

"I don't know whether it's your voice, Lafe, or your sweetness, or what you say——"

CHAPTER LIII

ON the porch we found Miss Bessie waiting for us. She was asleep but at the sound of our steps on the gravel, she sprang up, pretending to be wide awake.

"Well, I've just been watching the Pleiades and Orion," she said. "They are moving toward the pines over there. It's twelve o'clock, but I'm as wide awake as a cricket. Aren't you sleepy, precious?"

The little face was like a saint's with love.

"No, Auntee," Lena said.

"But it's time young people were in bed, or what will Miss Lily think?"

"Who's Miss Lily?" I said. I knew I ought to have known.

"The sheets," Lena said, smiling and patting her aunt's hand. "You remember Miss Lily White? Of course he does, Auntee."

"When he was a little bittie boy."

Of course I did.

"What on earth have you two been talking about? Acting?"

I realized with a start that art had not entered my mind, nor had Lena mentioned it as a part of her life. But I said:

"Yes, volumes. Acting, acting, acting, Cousin Bessie."

"And said what, may I hear?"

"I was advising Lena to write to Kelly."

"Kelly?"

"Her manager last year—and ask him if he's got some good play for her."

Lena turned to me in surprise.

"And if she has a good part, she'll take it," I went on.

"Soon?"

"If he says so."

Miss Bessie thought some time before she said finally: "I think you are right."

"But not leave you so soon, Auntie dear, so soon after—" Lena said, tenderly.

Miss Bessie shook her head and smiled.

"Don't think of me. Doctor Fernandez said when he was here this morning that I ought to have a change—he said Colorado."

"Auntie, you are sick and haven't said a word."

"Don't you believe it, Miss. I'm sound as a dollar!"

"You can't fool me," Lena lifted Miss Bessie's chin with her palm.

"Well, if I am, it's only tired. I need a tonic or a trip. You can ask Doctor Fernandez himself. But really—good night, son, I must take this young lady to bed. She can write her letter to-morrow. I'll promise to stand over her, honestly. Listen."

Down at the negro cabins beyond the garden we could hear a mandolin and a guitar, distinct in the still night. Nobody spoke as we stood listening. It was an old tune; we had heard it all our lives. Music is a strange thing.

So it was Miss Bessie after all, I thought, who had sent Lena back into the theatre. By what strange working of love, I asked myself, had her instinct led her to that?

The music stopped.

"Wasn't it sweet?" Miss Bessie said, "Nothing

like the darkies for sweet music. What's the name of that piece? I know I know it. Ma used to sing it, but I can't recollect the name."

"I've forgotten it too," I said.

CHAPTER LIV

As I walked along thinking how hard I had tried to be of use to Lena, of how dull I may have been and what she was going through, I had again, what I had had before, the sense of vague outline, of something elusive about her, as if her youth spread away into eternal nature and life.

I tried to see distinctly in my mind her face as she stood at the gate a little while before. I could see the line of her body, the droop of her head, but the face eluded me. I saw it only vaguely, lovely but indistinct. I could see Arthur's distinctly, like a print on the wall. I could see Dean Withers, President Doyle, but not Lena. "Of people we merely like or know," I thought, "we can summon up an image as sharp as a mask. But this unreality is true of the people we most love. Try hard, we can't see them in our mind's eye. If we relax, their image may come, some glance, some line; but if we try to catch it, it fades. What we know of them is farther within them." I decided that this was because the beloved person shares in the mystery of love and is removed from us into love's miracle and wonder.

The road turned now into cleared fields with more than three-quarters of the horizon low and open. I could see the sky of the clear spring night and the great stars and their constellations. To the south Antares and Scorpio, overhead Arcturus, and northward the Big Dipper, with the Pole Star. Toward the northern horizon in the midst of infinite starry points the stars of Castor and Pollux and Ariadne in their eternal splendor, and the constellation of An-

dromeda. As I turned toward the campus road they sank from view and left only the heavens overhead shining above the trees.

The fraternity houses began soon after the campus grove; six of them were spaced along the drive. On the steps of the first I saw two figures sitting, half visible in the shadow of the porch. Fatty Barrell's voice called out:

"It's the doctor! Why, Hal, what in hell you doing at this hour? Come on over."

I stopped.

"Well, what are you doing on the S. A. E. steps?" I asked. "Think this is our frat?"

"Don't we know this is not the frat, Jimmy?"

"Absolutely," Jimmy said.

"Come on, sit down. Have a drink, little brother."

"Not with students, thanks," I said. "Want me to lose my job?"

"But you've resigned, haven't you? The fellows at the house are damned sorry, old man. This is corn, white lightning. But you soak juniper-berries in it and filter it; can't tell it from gin."

Jimmy said: "Can't tell anything from gin these days. What you talking?"

Fatty gave a chuckle. "This is the stuff we keep hidden in a family vault in the cemetery. Nobody'd ever think of looken there. Don't we, Jimmy?"

"Absolutely."

"Well, it's time you got home. I know about the vault. Come on with me, I'll see you to your door."

"Oh, no, come on sit down here. Got a story I heard to-day."

I sat down and Fatty put his heavy arm around my neck.

"Oh, wait'll I tell you—" he began his smutty story, laughing so himself that he swallowed most of it and I never got the point. Jimmy began to sing. They were drunker than I had thought. I got up.

"Come on, you'll be waking up the men."

"No, wait'll I tell you."

"You can tell me if you come on to your own steps."

"All right, then, word of honor?" Jimmy was already on ahead.

Our house was the last in the row.

"Sorry the old doctor died," Fatty said, as we arrived. "Wish I'd known him better. He was a gentleman."

"Pity you hadn't then, son," Jimmy called back, and went on into the hall and up-stairs, where you could hear him waking up the men, shouting and calling their names.

"Go on with Jimmy, Fatty," I said.

"No, wait'll I tell you. You think I'm drunk but I'm not, it's only the sting of the grave."

"Go on with Jimmy, Fatty."

"I got a sermon you must hear. It was intended for God; I reckon it ought to be good enough for a damned professor."

"Preach it in chapel to-morrow then."

"Oh, wait'll I tell you how obscene it is, son; 's on passion. But I swear our janitor heard every word of it at Cistern Hill, the nigger preacher preached it just as I tell you. Say, you know you're a good fellow, Hal, you're white as a sheet of paper without any lines on it. That's what."

"The fellows are starting something," I said. "Listen."

"You're white as snow, Hal."

"Well, that's nice. Listen."

"Better go up and see," he said.

He stumbled indoors and left me to go in peace. That Gargantuan voice of his and the hooting and howling of the brothers, like a jungle awakening, spread out over the quiet air. As I walked along under the trees I could hear it a long way.

In the midst of it I thought of Lena, and suddenly the robust volume of life grew small and innermost. It seemed an eternal thing, far off and plaintive, deep down in me, most personal and universal and immortal. I heard a low music in my soul, and seemed a child lying between two quiet arms, seemed to hear a heart beating and a low song sung to me that would outlast the noise of the world. The goodness and wisdom of women seemed the wisdom and goodness of life, of which I, the man, was the seed and strength and failure.

CHAPTER LV

I FIGURED that it would be a good thing for me not to go to Friendship very much for a while. It only meant we should be talking things over again, and that could do no good. Staying away would be easier than it might have been at other times, for I was excited about a book I had begun. Two articles in a magazine had caused a publisher to write. Why not a volume of these, eight or ten in all? he said. He had an opening on his fall list for just such a book, and if I could get the manuscript to him by the end of June he would bring it out in November. I had promised him the manuscript and wanted to be about it.

The title by which I was calling my book by no means described it, *The High Clouds*. And the book-sellers would have a hard time describing it, for it would be neither fiction, nor short stories, nor literary essays, nor criticism, nor a book of æsthetics, but a form of my own. The publisher understood what the book would be from the two pieces he had seen; they took in the Southern country and people, with strangers from the North or abroad who came in contact with these people and this country, and made out of it all something about life and art. *Red Gates* was one, it took the title from Homer's epithet for the lips, and was made up all of chatter in which a Virginia High Church bishop tilts at Methodist revivals. I had others half written, and outlines and ideas for more kept popping in my head.

The mere fact that a publisher was waiting for the book had set me going like fury. Just now, too, I

should have more leisure for writing: the classrooms in the college were slowing down, the final examinations were the only thing left to the academic year, and reading the examination papers would be largely mythical—the only faculty member who read through all his papers was old Professor Munger, who was not so old, for that matter, fifty-two or three, but who wore long-sleeved flannel undershirts till June and had a coated tongue.

Two or three days after our long talk, however, I had to call in at Friendship to talk over Kelly's reply to Lena's letter. I went by late that afternoon.

Kelly had answered with a telegram so long that it made Miss Bessie ask if that was the way they spent money in New York. He had just tried out a play in Atlantic City, he said, which had turned out a frost. He was about to cast another play with a view to presenting it first in Chicago, where he had the best theatre in town leased for the summer. Could Lena join the company in Chicago for rehearsals? Rehearsals would begin in two weeks. The new piece was by the same author as *The Rose Sleep*, but more popular in appeal. Surefire. The situation was similar, but in the second play the setting was on Cape Cod among the fishermen. The title they had for it at present was *The Captain's Lass*. Four hundred and fifty a week. Would like early reply.

"*The Captain's Lass?*" I said, when I read the telegram. "Sounds worse than *The Rose Sleep*, Lena!"

"He as good as tells you it's worse. That's why he's so delighted."

"You'll accept then?" I asked.

"Yes."

"And wire Kelly?"

"Yes. To-night. We all think I should, don't we?"

"I wish it were a better part, somehow. Something really beautiful."

"That wouldn't be life, not for me," she said.

"It wouldn't be Broadway," I said, ignoring the tone of her voice. "However, you'll be learning your art."

"Yes. I suppose we ought to be thankful."

After that day Lena was sick, not very sick, Miss Bessie told me, when I called. Doctor Fernandez said a week in bed and she would be all right. Lena seemed indifferent to everything, her aunt said, and ate almost nothing, said nothing, just lay there in bed. What could anybody do? Lena had to eat something to put some flesh on her bones. What could you do?

"Nothing," I said.

I tried to forget Lena lying there in her room upstairs at Friendship. She would have to go through this alone.

I tried to keep my mind on other things. So, I thought, Lena is going back into the world, as it were; back into this America of ours that is like a child's dream, such a world as a child would wish if he could have his heart's desire; this country of ours, so ripe, light, good-natured and hard, running blindly with the power that sweeps it along. She was going back to New York. A long expanse of living was ahead of her, after what had happened. What had happened—it was as if life had written for her a rôle that she could study, that she could return to again and again, as an actor studies a rôle that some dramatist has created.

But that was no reason to think her life in its own way should not go on. In nature change and passing does not limit what follows. The sea, the trees, the clouds live and pass, but the fresh forms of them that follow are limitless. In human beings a nature pure and complete in itself is not destroyed by what comes to it. Its life goes on.

I plunged into my book. And then, by the time the week was up that Doctor Fernandez had prescribed for Lena, a letter came from Judie. For Judie it was a long letter. I had not had even a note for months; a word at Christmas, but that was just a wood-cut and a greeting; nothing since then.

How were Lena and I? Judie said, and why did we never write? We might have evaporated into thin air for all she knew. Please write. She must tell me her history, as usual, dear old Hal.

The banker who was—after a fashion—her father-in-law had died and Phil was not going to be a painter but had settled down in the bank. Catherine and Gentry Craig were still in Europe and she and Phil were to join them there; but now, of course, that wouldn't happen. That had enraged Judie so that she and Phil had had a quarrel and not seen each other for three months. Another illusion gone, she thought, and had begun an affair with Felton Stein.

I knew Felton Stein's books by sight at least, and had read two hours in one of them. He was twenty-five and had been called a brilliant revolutionary. His theme was primitive sex, the chasm between the generations, and most of his characters college seniors or men a year out of college. I had seen him talking once at Romany Marie's, and I could remember how I had watched him after every smutty remark grow

rosy with the sense of victory won over all conservatives and all novelists ten years older than himself. He hardly seemed a brilliant change for Judie.

But I was hasty. Judie went on to write that the Stein affair was soon over and done with. Phil and she had realized how much they loved each other, they could not live without one another. They were going to be married, and she was going to have a baby. She had discovered that she was born to be a mother. Think of coming to that, after all her galavanting!

"Judie married and settled down," Lena said, when she had read to the end. I had found her sitting on the porch, when I took the letter over for her to read. She folded the long crazy sheet of paper into its envelope again and handed it to me.

"Old Judie!" was all I said.

Lena got up and went to the end of the porch and stood there leaning against one of the columns and looking out across the garden. I knew what was in her mind.

I began to say anything that came into my head about the garden, which lay under the gentle, clear sunlight in full summer. Many of the flowers were past, though the red amaryllis and the day lilies and roses were at their height. The sweet peas were still in, and the fuchsias covered with blossoms. The syringas were long since shattered, the berries indeed had begun, but now the hedge was full of little butterflies, as if the lost petals had come blowing back among the leaves. It was a time for only gentle, happy thoughts, for the deep, shy power of joy, and the intelligences that awake with the morning.

I was relieved when Miss Bessie came out with a

glass of milk for Lena. Miss Cornelia came chattering away behind her, with a bundle of old neckties she was sorting.

"I was just telling Cousin Bessie about the time the Floyd girl met her father at the front door when he brought his new wife home and the poor child dropped the lamp and was burned to death. She'd begged her father not to marry again—that was fifty years ago."

"She's been telling me terrible things the whole time we were in the storeroom," Miss Bessie said. "For conscience' sake, Cousin Cornelia, don't you know anything pleasant?"

"Well, yes, I know something funny about Joe Floyd's second wife."

"Well, do tell it."

"This Mr. Floyd wasn't exactly what he ought to've been, I reckon. Somehow he didn't know when to stop at just the right point."

"She means he robbed the bank," Miss Bessie said bluntly.

"Oh, I wouldn't say just that. You don't know what the man may have meant."

"I know Brother Ab lost more money by it than he could afford. The decent people have to make up for these men."

"Well, at any rate, his wife had to take in sewing afterward to support herself. So one day she was sewing for Cousin Genie Holmes. And that afternoon when they got through there was a chemise missing. Cousin Genie said, 'There's a chemise short,' so Mrs. Floyd asked if she meant to accuse her of taking it, in a way that made Cousin Genie mad, and she said, 'Where is it, then?' So they were both furious and stopped speaking."

"Oh, Lawsy, aren't people silly!" Miss Bessie said. "Cousin Genie's always been like that."

"Afterward the garment was found but Cousin Genie was so mad at her she wouldn't tell Mrs. Floyd. They went on for a long time till there was a revival at our church, and both Cousin Genie and Mrs. Floyd were there, and Cousin Genie got religion and began to shout up and down, right by the altar, blessing the Lord, and crying, and saying: 'Oh, Mrs. Floyd, I found the chemise! Mrs. Floyd, I found the chemise! I found the chemise!'"

"You meet some very unusual people in the world," Cousin Cornelia added, the sweet old thing, pleased with making us laugh.

As I rose to go, Miss Bessie offered to walk to the gate with me. "You'll be going away so soon," she said.

"I don't know," I said. "I may stay June out, finishing my book."

"Lena has one more week with us. To think Brother Ab will be dead a month by then! You wouldn't think it."

We were almost at the gate before we spoke again.

"Poor darling, I suppose it's lonely for her here this winter," Miss Bessie said.

"Sometimes," I said, "I reckon sometimes, of course."

"There're not so many people in Clearwater who are artistic, and her father's gone now. And of course I'm no use—and then two old women in the house naggin' each other since Cousin Cornelia came. It's awful when you love people and just can't help doing things that make them miserable."

"Well, of course," I said; "here you are sort of

exposed to life; in New York you can always go out and do something, get your living done for you."

"I reckon so. But tell me, honey, didn't Lena know any nice people in New York? Of course there was Mrs. Courtlandt, but then she was old. I mean that Judith of hers and that Cleveland Towns, and of course I've seen Arthur, what he is. But weren't there any nice people Lena knew? I'll be switched if I'd think so."

"Well," I said, "Judie and the others were nice enough, I suppose, but you see Lena was thrown into just that one kind of world. And then she wasn't there so long, you know."

"No, I suppose not. But still I've often thought—it's not what the child was raised to."

"No," I said, "it's not."

"Good night, honey."

"Good night, Cousin Bessie."

Judie's letter had started me thinking about New York. And then all of a sudden Beulah Eisner popped into my head. Somewhere lately I had seen a review of her new book, which she called *Words, Words*. According to the review, it was a profound masterpiece.

I had a picture of Beulah that day on my stair in Barrow Street. I could see her cocking her eye at me, like a wild fowl resorting to philosophy, and asking me about Lena. I wondered if Lena was really in *Words, Words*. Beulah Eisner had studied her for copy. She had wanted to ask me four questions about this striking girl. I remembered exactly each of the questions and how flippantly I had dodged giving her an answer.

Now what sort of a person was Lena? I knew her

better and Beulah wanted to ask me. Had Eleanor feeling? Was she intellectual? Was Eleanor of the theatre? Would she be a great actress?

I had evaded that questionnaire. But I would answer them now if even Beulah Eisner asked the questions; just now I felt like going through them.

Had Lena feeling?

You could have said, speaking one way, that she was a woman who abandoned her life to sentiment. But it would be better to say that she was open to life. Certainly she would never have described herself as a woman of great passion or intensity, but then she would never have described herself at all. I could see Lena still as she stood there by the column on the porch, and I thought of all that had happened to her of late. It had not destroyed her, or poisoned her. But, on the other hand, you could not say that she had rebounded from it because of her youth or because the theatre helped to distract her. No. Lena had given herself to what had come, felt all that it meant; and out of it she would receive whatever was her own. The feeling that Lena was capable of was the kind of feeling it broke your heart to think about.

Was Lena intellectual?

No, not in Beulah Eisner's sense. What Lena had was natural wits, a good brain. She might be casual or innocent, or, out of loyalty or politeness, she might not contradict, but she was never stupid. On the other hand she had few conscious theories and no opinions so important to her that she insisted on conveying them to other people. Her Southern bringing-up would scarcely have led to that anyhow. She had her own ways of being right, as Beulah Eisner had of being wrong.

Was Lena of the theatre?

Lena was not of anything. Life had carried her into the theatre, and I could imagine her retiring at any time if something else arose that meant more to her. And here she was now, going back to the theatre and to a chance in it that hundreds of people would have given all they had to win, just as she had gone into it first in *The Rose Sleep* two years ago, taking it naturally and like everything else. Day followed day, and life went on with its rich burden and manifestation, but life was first of all within you, and only afterward, one way or another, given out in an art.

And so—for the last item in Beulah's list—Lena, if she went on and if she got to act in plays worth a rap, might in time be a good actress. So far, of course, for all her Broadway success, she had got only to the threshold of art.

As an actress she would never have power, never anything of that thrilling staginess that some actresses have, something like the excitement of wild animals in a cage, something given off to the audience magnificent or brilliant. Lena had not the gifts at which we look and see at once that they are remarkable but must be born in you, and that seem to belong to the world of nature like the brightness of light, the hardness of rocks, the freshness of water. What Lena had was more inner and entirely human. She would draw you and hold you by something more poignant and completely personal, something that she must learn a technic in order to express, but that was given off half unconsciously and in spite of herself.

And what Lena was had passed into me and the

things I wrote, forever. I knew that. I went on home from Friendship that day thinking of my book. I wanted my writing to be what life is—exact, most precise and actual, like the ground under my feet, like my eyes seeing, like my feet walking, my body, my hands, but exalted too, rising into its exaltation. I wanted my writing to be like my eyes: when they are open I see, when they are closed I know that they are alive.

As for Miss Beulah Eisner, I should have liked to have her there on Willow Street alongside of me, and twist her neck for her. She was everything that Lena made detestable.

CHAPTER LVI

DURING that remaining week of Lena's at home I went little to Friendship, but left her to be with Miss Bessie as much as she could. We should have a good chance at a parting talk, for I had offered to go with her as far as Memphis, where she would catch the fast train north. I was glad that I was not even going by for her and was not to see her saying good-bye to her family and leaving Friendship. Doctor Fernandez had asked permission to bring her to the station.

Saturday morning around nine o'clock, when I was putting out pajamas to go into my bag and what little else I would need overnight in Memphis, Dean Withers knocked at the door.

"You're likely busy," he said, when I appeared, "and won't care to do it; but it's too hot later in the day and you haven't got a class now. I came by to ask if you'd go for a walk." He saw the packing under way, however. "But I'm afraid I'm out of luck. Going on a trip?"

"Only as far as Memphis. I'm putting Miss Lena Dandridge on the Cannonball."

"Is she leaving?"

"She has to be in Chicago. But it's two hours yet before train time. Won't you sit down?"

"I don't know as I ought'o stay," he said, taking off his hat and wiping the beads of sweat off his bald forehead, as he sat down. "You're sure I'm not in your way, old man?"

"Not at all," I said, observing at the same moment that his little eyes looked much too interested.

"Isn't it rather unexpected?" he asked, smiling and showing his teeth.

"Yes, a week's notice. She had a telegram offering her a new play."

"In Chicago?"

"Yes."

"I suppose they'll try it out there before they venture on New York."

"Yes," I said.

"And a tempting salary, I suppose."

"Yes, quite good."

"Isn't it annoying how much these people get? More in a week than we get in a month, almost."

"College professors?" I asked, vaguely.

"Yes. But of course it's an old story how professors are underpaid."

"Well, of course, I think that with a few exceptions they are greatly overpaid."

Dean Withers laughed loudly, as if I were Bernard Shaw.

"I swear, Boardman, that's true of some I know." And I could see why the students hated him.

"I've certainly done little enough work this year, I must confess," I added.

"Well, old man, to be quite frank, I must confess I don't understand your method. The students like it, but I don't think the students are judges in these matters."

He had tried to tell me this before, on other occasions, and this morning I felt like answering him.

"And I don't see," I said, "how you could understand my method except by being in my classes. If I could state my method in a few words, it wouldn't be worth stating."

"You're always pat the way you answer," he said, smiling again.

"Not that I think it's worth much. Or I'm worth much. But I've got one thing straight in my head——"

"Oh, go on with you, you're an old cynic," he said.

"And it's this—if I'm good enough to do college teaching I'm much too good for it."

He did not even hear that observation, though I felt pretty neat about it. Something else was in his mind.

"So Lane's gone, got a leave of absence for the rest of the term. Is he sick?"

"He has rheumatism, I hear," I said.

"But I thought you saw a lot of him?"

"I did sometimes."

"I should have supposed Miss Dandridge would have announced her engagement to Lane before this. But it seems to be off. People certainly expected it, you heard a good deal about it."

I was silent, busying myself with lighting a cigarette.

"But of course people will talk. I don't know as I think Clearwater's any worse than any other place. People will have tongues."

I looked at him, but his dry and sagging little face showed nothing. He tried again.

"I suppose there was nothing in it."

"In what?" I asked squarely.

"I mean people's thinking they were fond of each other. Just gossip. It's natural when a woman's as beautiful as Miss Eleanor. By the way, she'll leave Miss Dandridge here, I mean her aunt? She's really

quite a charming old lady. Calling there, as I've done this year, I've seen more of her."

"The two older ladies will summer in Colorado," I said.

When he left I went to the window and watched for him coming out of the door. I saw the tan alpaca suit appear and then the sloping, narrow shoulders, and short, heavy legs. His paunch was getting to stick out in front.

"Well," I thought, as he turned off and disappeared around the dormitory corner, "Lena will be spared this kind of thing, at least."

And here was I, too, leaving the University and with very few regrets.

For that matter I felt no particular desire to be at any other university; there may perhaps be far better places than Clearwater, but in these confused times of ours there is little to choose among them. If I had a chance at all the colleges, I should choose by the climate.

CHAPTER LVII

Two miles out of town at Ruffin's, a little platform where the train stopped when signalled, I had to give my seat to an old lady in a black calico dress and black sunbonnet, yellow with dust from country roads, who was carrying a great bunch of cannas wrapped with newspaper and a shoe-box for luggage. She was getting off two stations ahead, she said, to visit her daughter. I stood in the aisle.

Fatty Barrell came along and shook hands with Lena and then with me. He was going to Memphis to make some arrangements for the Senior Ball. He began to chuckle about his furniture. Every year he had sold it to Dolmann, the second-hand man near the town square. And Dolmann had been too sloppy to come for it, so that the furniture had stayed right on where it was till next year, when Fatty sold it to him again. Dolmann paid only a fifth of what the stuff was worth, and Fatty figured that if he had one more year to sell it again he would have collected the fair price.

The train slowed up for a station and Fatty's companion signalled to him that seats were found. The old lady, with her cannas and shoe-box, followed him down the aisle, bending first to one side and then to the other, trying to see around him.

"Well, at any rate you miss the horrors of Commencement," I said to Lena as I sat down beside her. "You won't see the dear trustees snooping about for

any faculty gossip they can hear, and you'll miss all that air of false jollification on the campus. Even I can remember a time when gracious old people came to Commencement Day in their silks and alpacas, a little faded, the blessed old things! They still believed in their Southern culture, whatever that is, and their orators still had some of the ornaments of classical education. They had a kind of tone, after all. But now—the less said——”

“And father liked it to the very last, bless his heart!” Lena said.

“He liked seeing people.”

“That’s it. People. And any kind of oratory.”

We were both looking at the town’s outskirts, negro cabins, tumbled-down fences, as if nobody had time to pick up a board if it fell across the path.

Lena turned to look into my eyes, smiling. Neither of us minded.

In Memphis, when our short journey was over, we left our bags at the station, lunched at the Gayoso, and walked down to the bluff above the river, which, in regions that were lower than this, had worked such havoc two months before. The Mississippi’s floods had sounded like a phrase till you saw the spot. But it was quiet enough now. Its broad stream, the color of clay, flowed steadily past, the surface smooth as a lake. There were two or three hours yet before Lena’s train. We found a bench by an elder-tree and sat down in the shade.

I thought I would sit quietly smoking, and let Lena talk or not as she felt. She took one of my cigarettes and lighted it, without saying anything or seeming to notice that she was smoking again; and I took that to be a good sign. She was too pale. There

were slight blue shadows still about her eyes and a transparency almost mystical in the white skin; but her lips were red, and her lovely hands were strong and young. After a while she began to talk of these last days at Friendship and of herself, speaking to me more simply and intimately than she had ever done before.

And I, who knew that we should never be likely to speak like this again, and that even now Lena could bring out into words only echoes of what she had felt and was feeling, sat there listening. I had the sense in her of blood kin, and of that strange completion of your soul that beauty is, and of goodness, which is the highest form of imagination. The afternoon light took up the sky, the slope beneath us, the river, and even the shadows beneath the tree where we sat.

Part of the time Lena was speaking I heard but absently. I was thinking of her—she would not be concerned over public questions or the issues of our American life; she would not try for intellectual habits or ways of speaking; to people, to all of us indeed, she would always seem glowing but far off; gentle and fine and warm but vague and elusive. And yet she would be one of those persons in whom life centres. She would mean an influence and a pause to many other people, who would hear her and remember her, in a world where there are so many echoes and so few voices.

Uncle Joe and Aunt Genie came over with Lucia after supper to say good-by to Lena on her last night at home but would not sit down. They kissed her, each of them twice, and Aunt Genie gave Lena an embroidered handkerchief and got in a shot—"We'll

pray you don't act in one of those padlocked theatres, honey," she said. "Pity the stage has to be so wicked."

"Well, Cousin Eugenia," Miss Bessie said, "I'm sure *The Rose Sleep* doesn't sound so bad as that."

"And *The Captain's Lass* is a sweet name, I vow," Miss Cornelia said; "we used to have a song called *The Sailor's Lass*; it was mighty sweet."

Aunt Genie said: "Still I'm bound to say your Uncle Joe and I would dearly love to see you marry and settle here. We all thought you'd be one of the faculty ladies."

Camillus Floyd came with a box of chocolates and stayed for half an hour, talking most of the time about a new murder at Friarspoint in the Delta, which Miss Cornelia wanted to know about because the boy who delivered the Memphis paper that morning had thrown it in the weeds somewhere and nobody could find it.

Afterward Lena and Miss Bessie and Miss Cornelia sat on the porch talking. But late as it was when she had gone to bed, Lena could not go to sleep for a long time. She lay thinking. Suddenly she could hear Arthur reading to her a poem of his that seemed to be very short.

And yet I have not seen thee nor heard thy heart
Knocking at my veins.

It was so real she could not tell now whether she had ever seen a poem of Arthur's like that or not. He read the poem and put his head down on her bosom.

Then he was not there and she was waiting for him. She kept standing by a window listening for his step. Sometimes she thought she heard a step, and would move back and stand by a table or something

as if she were occupied and not too excited; that was out of pride. She could scarcely breathe. When he came she knew she would do what she had always done, and compare him, when she saw him, with what he was in her imagination when he was away from her. But he never came.

Miss Bessie had come in to shut the window near Lena's bed, for a wind had sprung up. The sound in the trees had waked every one. Lena begged her not to stay, Miss Bessie was already worn out. But she would stay, and knelt down by the bed and kissed Lena.

"I'll never leave you," she said.

After a while Miss Bessie lay down on the bed and must have fallen asleep some time toward dawn, for an hour after the sun was up Lena crept out and left her there. She put a shawl over her nightgown and stole out of the room and down-stairs into the garden. The garden was all fresh and quiet, the dew was still there and the shadows across the walks. Many of the flowers were already over, their petals were falling, and the garden was neglected of late. But death had no reality for her; only the renewed, fresh, living world, and only love seemed real; death seemed not to exist as she walked there, with the old garden before her and the old house where her family had spent their lives, and with her little aunt's voice still in her ears, saying: "I'll never leave you."

After a while she saw Aunt Callie coming in by the garden gate along the walk to the kitchen. She saw her push the kitchen door open with her knee and go in. Breakfast would soon be ready if Aunt Callie had come, and Lena could already hear Miss

Bessie and Miss Cornelia going for each other about something or other, in the room down the hall. She went back to her room to dress.

At breakfast Miss Bessie sat looking nervously about her and whacked her knife and fork down on her plate. Lena looked at the stern little face and the querulous frown on the brow, and smiled across the table at her.

Miss Bessie did not smile.

"You dear little auntee, I take it you're feeling belligerent this morning," Lena said.

"Oh, no, it's just—" Miss Bessie stopped.

"Just what?"

"Oh, it's just this cousin of mine."

"Did I hear a battle just now up-stairs, when I was dressing?"

"Well, your Cousin Cornelia ought to be spanked, that's all."

Miss Cornelia sat placidly buttering her cakes.

"She's certainly very naughty," Lena said.

"Well, honey, she's got no business being so stubborn. She will stand up when she puts her drawers on. She's going to fall and break her hip before she gets through with it. I tell her she'll break her leg but she's bound and determined she will stand up."

Lena burst out laughing.

"She will," Miss Bessie repeated.

Miss Cornelia looked up, with a laugh.

"That's all right, Elizabeth. Lena, my cousin doesn't know what a temperate woman I am."

"Temperate! Oh, Lawsy!"

"I say I'm so well balanced you have to push me to make me move either way."

"Balanced! She's getting childish, poor thing.

Here, Cousin Cornelia, don't sit there eating that old cold cake. Here, take one of these hot ones."

Miss Cornelia smiled. "Very well, Cousin Bessie."

She took a batter cake from the plate Miss Bessie handed her.

"Take two; it takes two to melt the butter."

Miss Cornelia smiled again, as if to say she gave up the field, and took another cake.

"Well, butter it, child," Miss Bessie said.

Miss Cornelia spread a pat of butter on the cake.

"Now, that's better," Miss Bessie said. She forgot all about her vexation, her brown eyes looked sweet again like a child's.

The little stream of family chatter went on. Lena could see that the old ladies were determined to keep off sad subjects, even the mention of her going away.

They began to talk of how much they longed to see the West. Uncle Joe and Aunt Genie Holmes had made three trips to Yellowstone Park and were always talking about it.

Miss Cornelia said: "When he's out there, you reckon Cousin Joe pays Mother Nature the same compliment he always pays the ladies?"

"Now why do you wonder that?" Miss Bessie said.

"I don't know. I just do."

"You mean his every prospect pleases and only man is vile?"

"Yes, Cousin Joe could flatter a whole mountain."

"I declare, Cousin Cornelia, you're a sight!" Miss Bessie said, laughing.

"You know it's the truth."

"And what does his wife think, I wonder?"

"Well, she's a woman this way: she spends a whole heap of time just resting."

Silas came in with a plate of hot cakes and let the door drift open again after him. Miss Cornelia turned to expostulate:

"Shut that door, Silas. I don't want people in the street looking down my throat."

Lena sat smiling while they talked. She heard her aunt telling about old Uncle Phil Develin, Aunt Callie's brother, and the figs he brought every summer, and then suddenly she still saw Miss Bessie and Miss Cornelia as they talked, perhaps, but she heard nothing they said.

Her eyes fell on the lawn outside, and the tree with the sun like a god standing in it.

She did not know whether she would ever have children or not, but a sense of the maternal filled her, as if she felt the child of life stirring within her body. And she did not know how great an artist she would become, though she would like to give to her art something men could not distinguish from their own souls. She could promise herself no strength, no happiness, not even sorrow. She only felt herself now lifted toward life. She sat there at the table with her little aunt and the gentle old cousin, not minding, only half hearing what they talked about, and then hearing their voices fading away from her.

She said to herself,

"I will believe wonderful things."



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